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KONRAD ADENAUER STIFTUNG

INCLUSIVENESS IN INDIAN MEDIA COVERAGE

Edited By
VINOD K JOSE

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This study came up out of the longstanding sense among a number of journalists and aspiring journalists, from a wide range of historically marginalised backgrounds, that not just in the composition of the newsrooms but also in the coverage of news reports, Indian media is far from inclusive. This research, therefore, is an attempt to see how inclusive Indian media is, primarily the newspapers, in covering conflicts and issues where one form or the other of marginality is involved.

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Vinod K Jose

30 November 2024

INTRODUCTION

/ Vinod K Jose

India is the most diverse nation on earth: it recognises 22 languages as official and speaks in thousands more; it has over 6,000 different caste groups; and has countless ethnicities and several religions. In 2023, India also overtook China as the world's most populous nation. It is also a constitutional democracy, promising to do justice to all. As the world's largest democracy, India historically recognised the role of a free press; the news media is expected to create an informed and just society. It is also true that India has a vibrant media business. With nearly 1,000 news channels and over 100,000 registered newspapers, it possesses arguably the most densely populated news landscape in the world.

Do these principles and numbers, while impressive on paper, translate to equitable or uniform coverage of India's diverse communities? We conducted a study to learn how the top print-media organisations in India cover the country's diverse issues and people. Do they give voice to its many communities adequately? Or do they show partisanship in coverage? Do the powerful and historically dominant groups that interconnect along lines of language, caste and religion get an upper hand? In a nutshell, how inclusive is Indian print media?

The study was novel in both its breadth and its approach. The study is meant to locate the Indian print media on where it stands on one of the celebrated goals of journalism— inclusiveness. The conclusion of the study therefore is to stress the point that media must be an inclusive

and democratic institution, and that the only way to achieve this is to cover communities fairly, without prejudices or biases in coverage.

General trends of where Indian media stands today

Media Business & Ownership:

India is the second fastest growing media market in the World, after China.[1] According to a recent market research prediction, Indian media and the entertainment sector will grow around 12-14 percent, and make over 24 billion dollars revenue in 2024.[2] Indian government officials monitoring media, on the other hand, have set a growth target for media and entertainment of over USD 100 billion by the year 2030.[3] According to the latest Indian Brand Equity Foundation study on the Indian media business, television accounted for 40 percent of the Indian media market, followed by print media (13 percent), digital advertising (12 percent), cinema (9 percent), and the streaming industries and gaming industries (8 percent).

While there are many general trends in ownership patterns across all forms of media in India, there is still some difference between the print media and electronic media. Although both are in the hands of very few players, electronic media ownership has increasingly gone to corporations who historically had very little interest in media—who made their money elsewhere—whereas print ownership, despite the owners having numerous business interests outside of media, is still concentrated in a handful of traditional media publishers, who are often family-owned publishers for a few generations. This trend in Indian television, where non-media industrial houses have taken over electronic media operations, has led to international headlines, and conversations echoing worries of monopolies entering the media space in a democracy, but domestically received very little resistance. Two of the richest men in India, Gautam Adani and Mukesh Ambani, are leading these takeovers. The Adanis (Adani Group) and the Ambanis (Reliance Industries) have their primary business interests in energy, port management, petrochemicals, natural gas, retail and textiles, and both of them are regarded as close allies of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. A decade and half ago, they had very little interest in the media business. However, in recent times, the political economy of the Indian television changed very fast. First, Reliance Industries started making a series of

direct, and in some cases indirect, acquisitions of Indian television studios. This was followed by the Adani Group. Today they both control the leading networks in English, Hindi and many other regional languages.

Reliance's big investments in media came from its growing appetite for monopolosing the telecom sector. Around the launch of Jio Network, the telecom business of Reliance chose to invest heavily in entertainment, sports and news broadcasts, trying to control not just the distribution network and telecommunications, but also the content of broadcast media. Adani, however, did not have the pretext of the telecom business to get into media. The Adani investment in media went directly into news television, and it coincided with increasing criticism of the company's crony-capitalist relationship with the state. However, neither of the big corporations are yet to make any serious impact on the way the Indian newspaper industry works. These businesses are directly under the control of the old publishing companies, either national or regional, and often owned by families, but keeping a firm grip on their operations, both in business and editorial. This only means that there is no big business monopoly yet; in terms of ownership concentration, a few of them control most of the markets. For example, in English, two newspapers accounted for nearly 50 percent of the total circulation.[4] In Hindi, the four top newspapers, *Dainik Jagran*, *Hindustan*, *Amar Ujala* and *Dainik Bhaskar* keep to themselves three out of four readers (76.45 percent of the Hindi readership), according to the 2019 RSF-DataLEADS study.[5] This trend is similar in other regional languages as well. The top two Tamil newspapers reach two out of three Tamil-speaking news readers. In Telugu, the top two newspapers reach 71.13 percent of Telugu readers.

Business-wise, the print media survives because of government spending as a major advertiser. Close to elections, political parties also spend exponentially more on Indian print media. Therefore, even without a big corporate takeover, the financial model of Indian print media makes itself historically vulnerable to pressures from the advertising side, often from the government and political parties. It therefore lacks the operational freedom that the print media in a democracy must ideally enjoy. Often, then, the class, caste and religious prejudices of the government, or leaders of the parties and their ideologies, can naturally rub off on to the decision-making process of the print media as well.

Diversity in Indian Journalism:

The quality of an industry, workplace or ecosystem in a democracy depends on the constitution of its manpower. And nowhere else is this as important as in the newsrooms in a democracy. If the human resources in a complex country like India tend to come from one kind of caste, class, gender and educational background, or pull people in from a few kilometres around the same big cities where the media house is headquartered, the chances are superlatively high that the coverage is also inadequate and skewed. Unfortunately, all studies until now reflect this dire problem in Indian media—that of a lack of diversity, from Indian media ownership to the journalists who walk into the newsrooms to work. Alarmingly, they tend to come from a tiny percentage of the elite sections in Indian society. There are only a few studies that paid attention to this problem over the years.

The first one was in 1996, kickstarted after a visiting foreign correspondent asked the Indian journalist BN Uniyal for the contact information of a Dalit journalist. Historically marginalised as untouchables, in terms of population, the Dalits comprised over 16 percent of the Indian population—three times the population of Germany. Uniyal, to his own disbelief, could not think of a single Dalit in Indian newsrooms. This shock prompted him to study the entire list of accredited journalists with the government. Of the 686 people named on the list, not a single one was a Dalit.

The second study came in 2006, when a few journalists like Anil Chamadia and Jitendra Kumar approached the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), a Delhi-based social-science research centre, to study the caste composition of Indian newsrooms. They studied the top echelons in 37 media organisations, spread across major Indian cities. It showed that the country's top castes, the "twice-born" Hindus (the dwijs, comprising Brahmins, Banias, Rajputs, Khatris etc), who make up about 16 percent of the Indian population, occupy about 86 percent of the decision-making jobs. Brahmins, atop in the caste hierarchy, alone constitute 49 percent of the personnel, though they are estimated to be less than four percent of the population of the country. India's 84-percent middle castes, lowered castes, and religious minorities occupied only 16 percent of personnel. Dalits or Adivasis—the "untouchables" and tribal people, who collectively formed a quarter of

India's population—did not show up at all on the survey. The Other Backward Class (OBC) population, comprising mostly the middle castes, and coming to around 43 percent of India, had only four percent of these jobs, the survey said.

I remember watching the 2006 CSDS study up close, since I was working on my PhD then, on the sociology of Indian news media. Besides the researcher hat, I then also had first-hand experience of being a minority journalist in the city for five years. As a Christian minority journalist who moved, in 2001, from a village three thousand kilometres away in south India, to New Delhi for work, I was made aware of my identity often by my colleagues during exchanges of ideas. My colleagues primarily came from a very small social pool, almost all from the top castes, and had gone to the same elite schools and colleges in the national capital or other metropolises itself. Our lived experiences and the thought process varied. Ideally, a different background must be regarded as an asset in a newsroom. But I felt like I had been tethered to the fence without even knowing the meaning of terms such as "diversity" or "inclusiveness in coverage" etc, until the CSDS study pointed out that the Indian newsrooms were under the grip of a tiny elite population, of the upper castes and classes.

The study's findings were so stark that it helped for the first time to put a quantitative number to refer to the constitution of the newsroom. In qualitative terms, it also helped people like me realise why people from unorthodox backgrounds felt there was an Othering, an alienation process. (Othering, as the cultural and communication theorists describe it, is the process whereby the majority builds an inclusive group identity, excluding the other, the issues they raise, the ideas they bring etc.) Often, in qualitative terms, a newsroom culture was built, where diverse interest groups in a story were not included, and these missing points of views were hardly even noticed. Police and government sources were venerated more than others, and journalists linked to them earned more respect within the newsroom than the rest. Even in the reported pieces, there was also a tendency to write the reports by relying on analytical skills, as opposed to the labour of reporting—going to the people, and bringing in all points of views. Truthfulness, fairness, thoroughness and meticulousness, therefore, often became the casualties in the newsrooms, a lot of which could be solved by diversity.

Six years later, after some years in the public radio in the United

States, and a Master's in journalism from Columbia Journalism School and a PhD in sociology of media, when I returned to Delhi and became the Executive Editor of *The Caravan* magazine, I was in a position of directing the course of the newsroom, and hiring my colleagues. In 2011, three years after I entered *The Caravan*, I advertised a staff writer position reserved for a Dalit or Adivasi person. Little did I know that it was the first time an Indian newsroom had put out an ad for a journalistic job restricting the pool of applications to only people from the marginalised communities. I soon received calls from powerful people in the Indian media industry, saying that such hirings would bring down the "merit," and was akin to introducing reservation in media. The callers included publishers, editors and celebrity columnists as well. We went ahead with that hiring and did more hiring of a similar nature over the years, consistently increasing newsroom diversity. Last time I studied the masthead, *The Caravan* is among the most diverse newsrooms in India. More than 40 percent of its journalists come from underprivileged communities. After nearly a decade and half of leading its journalistic operations (I left the magazine in early 2023), it is my reading that if *The Caravan* had a certain edge over other media houses for quality journalism in India, besides longform reporting and investigative journalism, the diversity in the newsroom also played a key role. But newsrooms like *The Caravan* that reach a couple of hundred thousand people are a very tiny drop compared to the large ocean of the Indian media landscape of big players who reach many millions, and there is no information as to whether such works of advancing diversity in one newsroom have had any qualitative impact in other newsrooms.

Most recently, there are two more studies that came out, the Oxfam-Newslaundry studies in 2019 and 2022, respectively. The former surveyed 121 newsrooms and found that 106 of them were led by journalists from the top castes—that is, 89 percent. In three years, by 2022, the percentage of newsrooms led by upper castes increased by one percent, to 90. The missing Dalit and Adivasi people continue to be a major issue in Indian journalism. None of the influential Indian media bodies, the Indian Newspaper Society of the media owners, or the Editors Guild of the top editors, have shown any concern on this issue. In other democracies, diversity in the newsrooms has been a major conversation in the field of media criticism since the middle of the twentieth century. The American Society of Newspaper Editors,

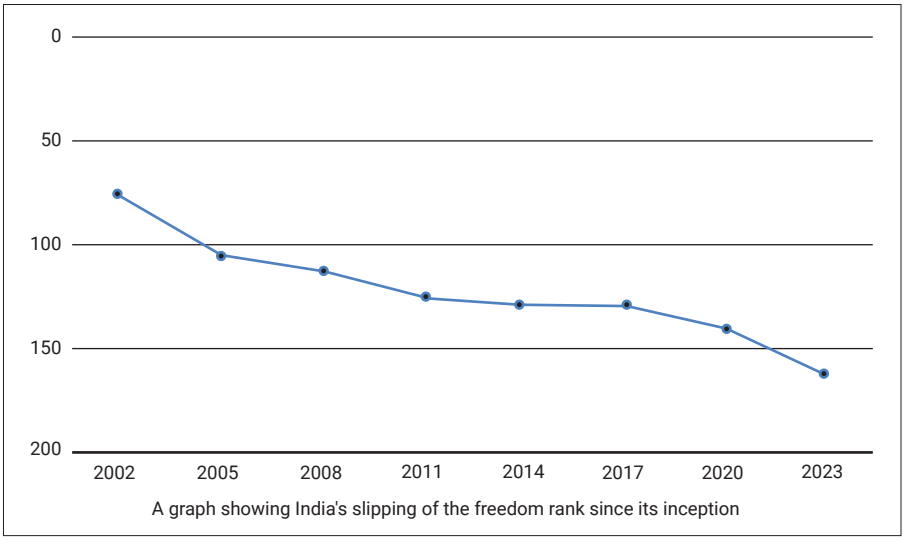
or ASNE, has been conducting annual surveys on newsroom diversity since 1978. These surveys helped gradually push US newsrooms into accepting more people of colour and diverse sexual and gender orientations. When the survey began, minorities were only four percent of the newsroom staff. Now, the share is 16.6 percent.

However, the inherent lack of diversity in the Indian newsrooms restricts their ideal democratic character, and it often operates as a club of people belonging to the same caste, class, religious and educational backgrounds.

Trust and Press Freedom:

Fifty-nine percent of Indian news media consumers do not trust the news content, according to the Reuters Institute. Religious minorities trust the media far less than the upper-caste Hindus, another study recently concluded.[6] The coverage of the poor is far less favoured and that of the rich is highly favoured, leaving again a trust perception of the natural class bias of the Indian media.

If there is a single most quantitative way to state where Indian news media stands today, it is the World Press Freedom ranking. India's ranking has fallen steadily down to 161, according to the latest World Press Freedom Index. In the Index's inaugural ranking in 2002 India was 80, and it slipped to 150 in 2022. In 2023, it slipped further down, by 11 places. Its neighbours, like Pakistan and Sri Lanka, have better ranks.



A graph showing India's slipping of the freedom rank since its inception

Cases studied to understand inclusiveness in Indian print news media

It is against the backdrop of these facts and trends that the current study on the inclusiveness in Indian newspapers was undertaken. How inclusive is Indian media towards the country's diverse set of groups and their issues? The study is carried out by looking into 15 select cases taken out from six languages, covering over 65 percent of the population of India. This is by no means a comprehensive study, since neither the number of cases, nor the languages, give the full picture of the complexity of the issue. Nevertheless, the study would still be one of its kind to explain, in both qualitative and quantitative terms, the place of inclusiveness—an important yardstick for a just media order in a democracy, in the news coverage of specific issues it dealt with.

The fifteen cases selected form the fifteen chapters of the report.

The first chapter analyses the ethno-religious, targeted violence between the Meitei and the Kuki communities in Manipur India's northeastern state, in May 2023. The Manipur violence was the worst of its kind in recent times in India, with police records accounting for 175 deaths, most of them Christians, and 386 places of worship attacked, most of them churches. One thousand one hundred and eighteen people sustained injuries, 33 went missing, and countless houses were destroyed. Elsa Ashish Thomas, journalism and humanities professor, studies the coverage of *Hindustan Times* during the first 30 days of the conflict. She studies the point of views represented in the coverage, datelines, photos and editorials and makes valuable conclusions.

The second chapter analyses the coverage of the Delhi communal violence in February 2020, where 53 people were killed, a majority of whom were Muslims. Shireen Azam, a doctoral researcher at the University of Oxford, carries out a case study of *Dainik Jagran*, India's most widely read Hindi newspaper, with a circulation of over two and half million. The study uses quantitative and qualitative analysis to look at how inclusive the newspaper was in its coverage to the multiple sides of the conflict. It studies points of view represented, coverage of victims, negative and positive associations that suggest a staggering amount of media bias in the paper's coverage, including its consistent casual association of the violence to the anti-CAA-NRC protests (over the new citizenship law that the Modi government passed), without the pres-

ence of any reportage to suggest such a link. (Even before the violence, it had pitched the protests as inherently violent.) Further, the paper demonstrated efforts to humanise police inaction by portraying them as "helpless" while also showing bias towards Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders—in the phase studied in the aftermath of the violence, for instance, it carried 45 articles that could be said to support the ruling BJP and the Hindu community, in contrast to 18, for the Opposition and the Muslim community.

During the peak three days of the violence, the riots did not make it to *Dainik Jagran*'s top story on its front page; therefore, if one were to try to understand the state of Delhi from India's largest newspaper on the main days of the violence, one would not be aware of the scale and intensity of the violence.

The third chapter analyses the media coverage of a fake encounter killing of an indigenous Adivasi person in Jharkhand in June 2021. The police killed Bramhadev Singh, a 25-year-old Adivasi man from a remote village in Jharkhand, claiming he was a Maoist. It was revealed soon that Singh had no association with the Maoists. Sushmita, award-winning journalist and researcher, studies the coverage carried out by *Prabhat Khabar*, a leading Hindi-language newspaper in east India that sells over three hundred thousand copies. The quantitative study analyses the space given to this incident, while the qualitative analysis looks at the unfolding of the event beyond what was reported, relevant questions media could have asked, media bias and other aspects when it came to covering rights of Adivasi people. Beginning with a historical and contemporary understanding of such killings in India, and the media's normalisation and dehumanisation that accompanies them, this report delves into the specific coverage of the encounter death of Bramhadev Singh.

The fourth chapter analyses media coverage of two sex crimes in Telangana in November 2019, wherein one victim came from an upper caste, and the other came from a lowered caste. The gang rape and murder of Disha (anonymised), a 26-year-old veterinarian in Hyderabad on 27 November 2019 shook the entire state and sparked outrage across the country. On the other hand, the gang rape and murder of Samatha (anonymised), a 30-year-old Scheduled Caste woman in the village of Yellapatar, in Asifabad-Komarambheem district, Telangana, on 24 November 2019—only three days before the incident involving

Disha took place—barely made it to news media. This study, carried out by researcher Jahnavi Uppuleti, analyses coverage, in *Eenadu*—the largest-selling Telugu newspaper, with over a million copies—of two sex crimes that occurred in the state of Telangana in November 2019, examining if, and how, the coverage differed for these two cases, both of which involved rape and murder.

The fifth chapter analyses the media coverage of an incident known as the Sterlite Killings in May 2018, in which police forces opened fire against locals who were protesting the expansion of a copper smelter plant, Sterlite Copper, owned by the multinational corporation, Vedanta Limited. The protestors, the poor fishermen in the Thoothukudi district of Tamil Nadu, opposed the contamination of water, soil and air caused by the plant. Researcher Ramani Mohanakrishnan studies the coverage in the Chennai edition of the Tamil daily *Dina Malar* from 7 May to 6 June 2018 of the protest against the plant, the police crackdown against protesters that led to the killing of at least 14 people (13 in shooting, one suspicious death in police custody nearly a week later) and the events that followed. *Dina Malar* has a circulation of nearly a million. The quantitative analysis examines how the news relating to the massacre was distributed and the categories it fell under, the space given to different viewpoints, and so on, while the qualitative analysis attempts to study whether the incident was covered inclusively in a wider thematic sense.

The sixth chapter looks into the coverage of an incident of caste violence in Gohana, Haryana. An upper-caste mob had torched 55 Dalit houses in Gohana in August 2005, and I carry out a content analysis of the media reporting. The quantitative analysis focuses on a particular newspaper—*The Indian Express*—for a particular period (a month). However, the qualitative analysis goes beyond the quantitative measurement of newspaper coverage, and attempts to study the issue, making use of all possible sources, including court documents, notices, pamphlets and extensive interviews to understand the aspects of the conflict that the media covered or ignored.

The seventh chapter looks into a similar caste conflict that took place in Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh, in April-May 2017, and studies the same newspaper as the previous caste conflict—*The Indian Express*. It helps to contrast the findings, to see whether the same newspaper's coverage of a caste conflict was any diferent after a gap of twelve years. In the

study of the Saharanpur conflict in *The Indian Express*, journalist and researcher Jaiveer Kohli Mariwala makes various observations, using qualitative and quantitative methods.

The eighth chapter studies how a women's economic issue and a protest around it was covered in the Punjabi language press. In 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, thousands of women in Punjab went on a strike against microfinance institutions (MFIs). Women, mostly Dalits, organised protest marches and rallies, alleging exploitation by MFIs, in hundreds of villages in the Malwa region of Punjab, between May and December 2020. In Punjab, needy urban and rural women are frequently given loans without any collateral, in groups comprising around twenty people each. When the economy came to a standstill after COVID-19, the government had promised that the lenders would not go to the women for repayment soon. But the field agents of the companies continued going door-to-door for repayments. Women alleged frequent bullying from such agents, which is what led them to organise marches in Punjab. Journalist and researcher Srishti Jaswal focuses on the coverage of the Punjabi newspaper *Ajit* for quantitative research. The qualitative analysis deploys sources from the women who protested, used videos, photographs, notices, and pamphlets that did not make to the media coverage and draws conclusions about how *Ajit* fared in fulfilling the value of inclusiveness while executing the role of a news media.

In the ninth chapter, media researcher Santo Thomas analyses the coverage of an honour killing that took place in Hyderabad in September 2020. Hemanth Kumar was killed by the family of his wife, Avanti, since Avanti's family detested his caste and class background. The couple stayed in Hyderabad, India's IT city, and had sought protection from the police since they feared an attack from Avanti's family, but Kumar was killed before the former could help. The study focuses on *Andhra Jyothi*, the leading Telugu newspaper, and uses quantitative and qualitative analyses, counting the space and columns allotted to the killing, as well as the number of paragraphs and words forming the newspaper reports about it. Free love is detested by influential families, and the couple who marry outside of their caste and class often risk death, since honour killing is a common crime in many parts of India. The study of *Andhra Jyothi*'s coverage gives insights into how media approaches honour crimes.

The tenth chapter analyses how death-row prisoners charged in a terrorism case—half of them were acquitted later—were covered in the media. Was the media inclusive towards the version of innocence that the accused vouched for? I analysed media coverage of the 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament. The 13 December 2001 terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament was a national security conflict. Following the attack, India made the biggest ever military mobilisation in its history, moving over a million soldiers and war equipments to its border with Pakistan. Four people were given death penalties for the attack, out of which two were acquitted by the High Court and Supreme Court, the third's punishment was reduced, and one was given the death penalty. The study carries out a quantitative content analysis of the *Hindustan Times*, followed by a qualitative content analysis of the media coverage of the conflict. The qualitative content analysis uses multiple sources—first information reports, confessional statements, affidavits, charge sheets, cross examination documents, judgments, editorials, pamphlets, TV broadcasts, private communication between involved parties on the nature of media coverage, and interviews.

The eleventh chapter analyses media coverage of two custodial deaths in Thoothukudi, in June 2020. P Jayaraj and J Bennix—a father and son who lived in Santhankulam, in the Thoothukudi district of Tamil Nadu—were killed by the police in custody. Both belonged to the Backward Class community and were Christians by faith. The incident is placed in the context of police violence and custodial deaths, referring to reports by the National Campaign Against Torture, the National Human Rights Commission and the National Crime Records Bureau to indicate how the majority of people who die in police custody are from marginalised communities, including Dalits, Adivasis, Muslims and Christians. The irony is that the killings of Jayaraj and his son, Bennix, took place only days after George Floyd was killed by the Minneapolis Police in the United States, and protests and widescale condemnation were taking place all over the world, even in India, but the media coverage of this incident in the Indian context was very different from that of Floyd. Researcher Ramani Mohanakrishnan employs quantitative and qualitative content analysis techniques, focussing on the coverage of the deaths in the Chennai edition of the Tamil daily *Dina Thanthi*, from 23 June 2020 to 23 July 2020.

The twelfth chapter studies the media coverage of the protest of the

Pourakarmikas—the city corporation workers in Bangalore—over the denial of the PPE kits, drinking water and sanitisation of work equipment during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Journalism professor Meljo Thomas Karakunnel looked at how the *Vijaya Karnataka*, *Vijaya Vani* and *Prajavani* newspapers covered the state-wide protest of the sanitation workers. Pourakarmikas are particularly vulnerable to health hazards, as they load and unload the garbage manually and without protective gear, and the pandemic had made it even riskier for them, without a quick and sympathetic response from the government. The workers also belong to the lowest caste and class strata, and the study puts to use both quantitative and qualitative research.

The thirteenth chapter analyses media reporting of a workers' strike at the Honda automobile factory, in Gurgaon, in July 2005. Labour conditions at the Honda factory led to a workers' strike, and subsequently police opened fire at the workers. I analyse the coverage of *The Times of India*, India's largest selling English newspaper, using both quantitative and qualitative research techniques. The quantitative analysis focuses on a period of one month, while the qualitative analysis attempts to see if there are patterns and conclusions that can be drawn from making use of all possible sources, including court documents, notices, pamphlets and interviews, to see how inclusive the media was towards the workers and their labour issues.

The fourteenth chapter analyses the media coverage of a protest by the forest-dependent Adivasi people against eviction from Nagarahole Tiger Reserve. Journalism professor Meljo Thomas Karakunnel studies the media coverage of the incident by *Vijayavani* and *Andolana*—the two most circulated Kannada newspapers in the Mysuru region of Karnataka. The study analyses reports from 17 March to 15 May 2021, the active period of the resistance. Though the protest went on for more than sixty days, the protesters were forced to reduce the strength after a few weeks, following COVID-19 protocols that were put in place during the second wave of the pandemic. The forest-dependent indigenous people are among the most vulnerable in the country, with only 50 percent literacy, and very little political and social representation.

In the fifteenth chapter, researcher Jahnavi Uppuleti investigates the *Deccan Chronicle*'s reportage covering the custodial death of Mariamma—a Dalit Christian woman, who was brutally tortured to death by the police, at the Addagudur police station in the Yadadri-Bhuvanagiri

district in Telangana. This study looked at the language, frequency of articles and perspectives taken into account in the reportage. It found that the news reportage in *Deccan Chronicle* of the incident during the period under study was very minimal, and did not look at most issues critically. It did not cover a broad range of POVS, such as that of Mariamma's family. Nor did it explicitly examine the police as violators during the phases analysed. Furthermore, the coverage only began once a Congress politician demanded justice.

METHODOLOGY

The research uses both quantitative and qualitative methods. Media-studies theorists, such as Paul Lazarsfeld, considered communication as a science, and there is hence a reliance on quantitative research in the discipline. The longest-standing communication research technique of quantitative measurement is adopted in this study. Increasingly, media research has also been influenced by interdisciplinary approaches, breaking the limitations of the quantitative methods, and drawing from the wide world of social science research, such as sociology, cultural studies etc. Consequently, without limiting the period of the study and research tools strictly as in the quantitative methods, this study also pays attention to laying out the context of the issue at hand and the pattern of the issue, if it existed before, to see if there are lessons on the coverage. It also uses interviews and looks for material other than the media coverage itself to see if the issue at hand was bigger than what the media ended up covering it as, and if there was a bias visible in the coverage. Together, the measurement that comes with the quantitative methods, and the sociological meaning and historical context that comes with the qualitative methods, are put to use as much as possible.

For quantitative research, most of the cases studied looked at the newspapers for 30 days around the news event. However, in a few cases, the number of days taken up for the quantitative study has varied, and in one case, the paper was not available in either analogue or digital forms, and hence the study had to use only the qualitative method. But in 14 out of 15 cases, the study has used a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods. An understanding of the methodology used in each study, which also varied slightly due to the availability of material and other logistical reasons, is given in the respective chapter itself.

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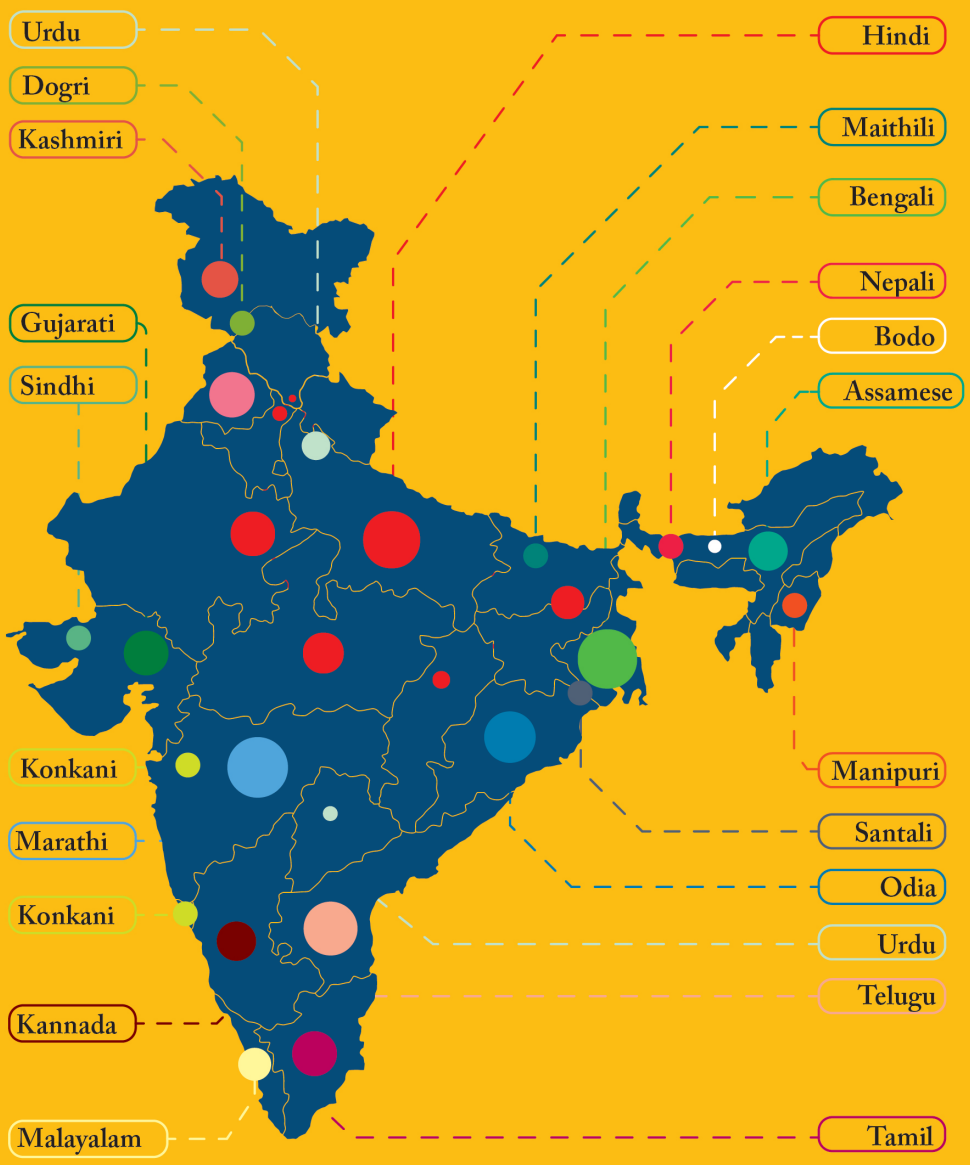
MAP 1, INDIA. ITS PRESS

1. Most populated nation on earth: 1.4 billion people
2. Most number of registered newspapers: over 100,000 newspapers
3. Most number of television media: over 1000
4. Internet penetration: 48.7 percentage of the population as of January 2023
5. Expected revenue of the media & entertainment market in India by 2023-24: USD 22 billion. Indian government's growth target for media by 2030: USD 100 billion.

Design: Jijo Govindan

MAP 2,
INDIA. ITS LANGUAGES



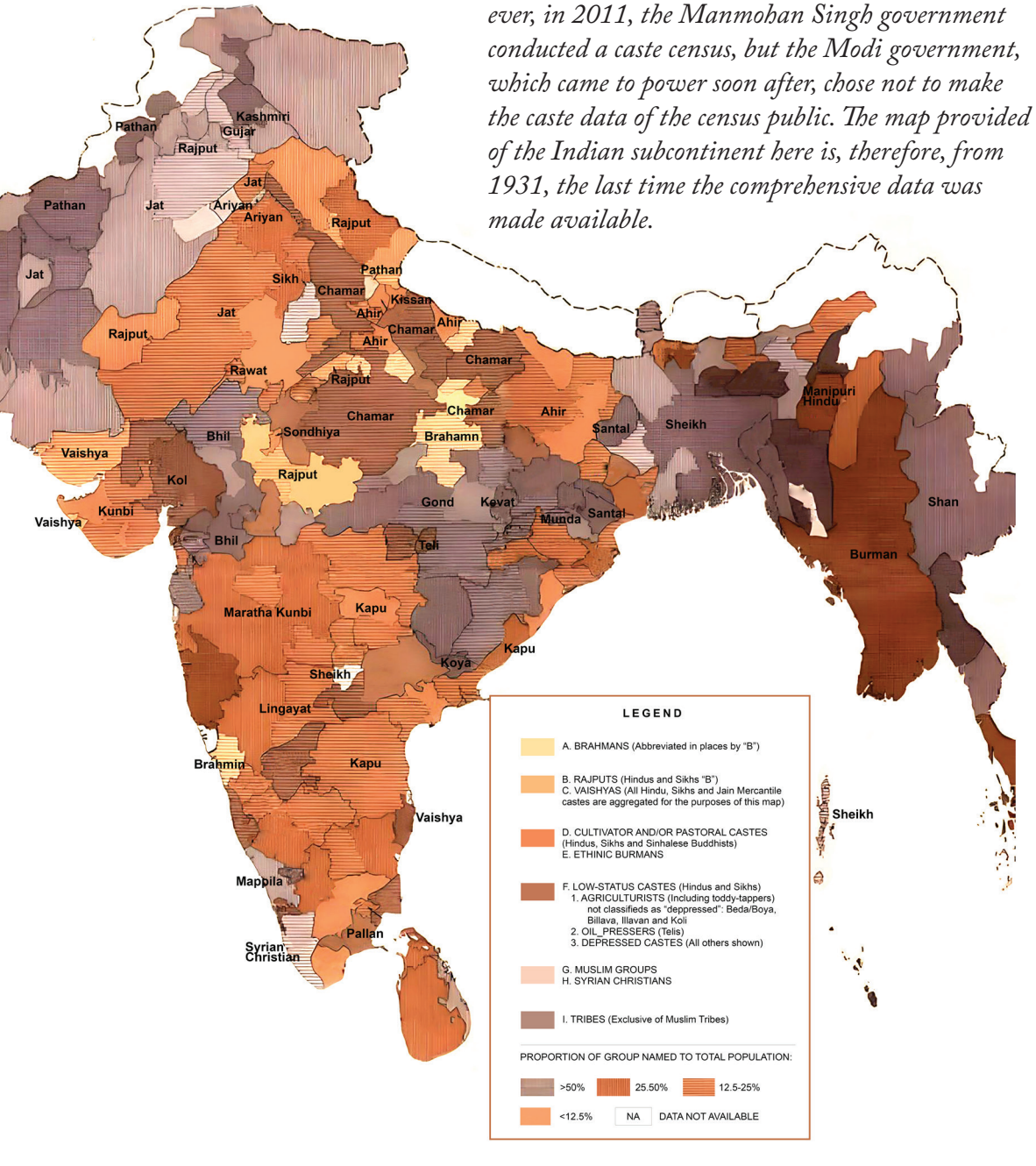
Twenty-two languages are recognised as official languages by the Indian Constitution, while nearly two thousand languages exist, according to the national census.

Rank	Language	Persons speaking as mother tongue	% to total population
1	Hindi	528,347,193	43.63
2	Bengali	97,237,669	8.03
3	Marathi	83,026,680	6.86
4	Telugu	81,127,740	6.70
5	Tamil	69,026,881	5.70
6	Gujarati	55,492,554	4.58
7	Urdu	50,772,631	4.19
8	Kannada	43,706,512	3.61
9	Odia	37,521,324	3.10
10	Malayalam	34,838,819	2.88
11	Punjabi	33,124,726	2.74
12	Assamese	15,311,351	1.26
13	Maithili	13,583,464	1.12
14	Santali	7,368,192	0.61
15	Kashmiri	6,797,587	0.56
16	Nepali	2,926,168	0.24
17	Sindhi	2,772,264	0.23
18	Dogri	2,596,767	0.21
19	Konkani	2,256,502	0.19
20	Manipuri	1,761,079	0.15
21	Bodo	1,482,929	0.12
22	Sanskrit	24,821	negligible

Design: Jiju Govindan

MAP 3,
INDIA. ITS CASTE

The data of caste from a national census is old, from 1931, when such a census took place under the British. Subsequent post-Independence Indian governments chose not to count caste, even though it remained the biggest social-justice issue. However, in 2011, the Manmohan Singh government conducted a caste census, but the Modi government, which came to power soon after, chose not to make the caste data of the census public. The map provided of the Indian subcontinent here is, therefore, from 1931, the last time the comprehensive data was made available.



The Religious & Caste Background Of Indian Publishers & Editors

Owners/principal shareholders of top ten newspapers, religion- and caste-wise:

NEWSPAPERS	RELIGION & CASTE
Dainik Bhaskar	Hindu | Agarwal, Bania
Dainik Jagran	Hindu | Agarwal, Bania
The Times of India	Jain | Agarwal, Bania
Malayala Manorama	Christian | Syrian Orthodox
Hindustan Times	Hindu | Bania
The Hindu	Hindu |Iyengar, Brahmin
Amar Ujala	Hindu | Mahesh-wari Bania
Hindustan	Hindu | Bania
Rajasthan Patrika	Hindu | Oswal, Rajput
Indian Express	Hindu | Agarwal, Bania

Editors of top ten newspapers, religion- and caste-wise:

NEWSPAPERS	RELIGION & CASTE
Dainik Bhaskar	Hindu | Brahmin
Dainik Jagran	Hindu | Brahmin
The Times of India	Jain | Jain
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Hindustan Times	Hindu | Brahmin
The Hindu	Hindu | Brahmin
Amar Ujala	Hindu | Brahmin
Hindustan	Hindu | Brahmin
Rajasthan Patrika	Hindu | Bania
Indian Express	Hindu | Brahmin

Owners or principal share-holders of top ten news television channels, religion- and caste-wise:

TELEVISION CHANNELS	RELIGION & CASTE
Republic TV	Hindu | Brahmin
Times Now	Jain | Jain
Aaj Tak	Hindu | Bania
ABP News	Hindu | Kayastha
News 18	Hindu | Bania
India TV	Hindu | Brahmin
India Today	Hindu | Bania
NDTV	Hindu | Bania
R.Bharat	Hindu | Brahmin
Zee TV	Hindu | Bania

Editors of top television channels religion and caste-wise:

TELEVISION CHANNELS	RELIGION & CASTE
Republic TV	Hindu | Brahmin
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News 18	Hindu | Brahmin
India TV	Hindu | Brahmin
India Today	Sikh | Khatri
NDTV	Hindu | Agarwal Bania
R.Bharat	Hindu | Brahmin
Zee TV	Hindu | Khatri

Owners and principal shareholders of top ten news magazines, religion and caste-wise:

MAGAZINES	RELIGION & CASTE
India Today	Hindu | Khatri
Outlook	Hindu | Bania
Open	Hindu | Agarwal, Bania
The Caravan	Hindu | Agarwal, Bania
Frontline	Hindu | Iyengar, Brahmin
Tehelka	Hindu | Khatri
The Week	Christian | Syrian Orthodox
Organiser	Hindu | Brahmin
Swarajya	Hindu | Brahmin
Forbes India	Hindu | Bania

Editors of top ten news magazines, religion and caste-wise:

MAGAZINES	RELIGION & CASTE
India Today	Hindu | Kodava
Outlook	Hindu | Kayastha
Open	Hindu | Brahmin
The Caravan	Sikh | Jaat
Frontline	Hindu | Brahmin
Tehelka	Sikh | Khatri
The Week	Hindu | Nair
Organiser	Hindu | Brahmin
Swarajya	Hindu | Brahmin
Forbes India	Hindu | Brahmin

How the Hindustan Times Reported the Manipur Violence in 2023

/ Elsa Ashish Thomas

ABSTRACT

This case study examines how Hindustan Times, *Delhi's most circulated English newspaper, covered the ethno-religious targeted violence between the Meitei and the Kuki communities in Manipur, in May 2023. The Manipur violence was the worst of its kind in recent times in India, with police records accounting for 175 deaths, most of them Christians, and 386 places of worship attacked, most of them churches. One thousand one hundred and eighteen people sustained injuries, 33 went missing, and countless houses were destroyed. The case study sheds light on the coverage of* Hindustan Times *during the first 30 days of the conflict.*

Clashes erupted between the predominant Meitei community, by and large Hindus, constituting 53 percent of the population and the tribal Kuki group, mostly Christians, comprising 16 percent of the state's populace. Recent data, released by Kuki Student Organisation (KSO) Media and Documentation Cell,[1] *accounts for 146 casualties in the Kuki community and 360 burnt-down churches and synagogues. The official police records*[2] *document 254 attacks on churches and 132 on temples. The outbreak of violence also led to*

displacement of tens of thousands of people and inflicted enduring losses to both communities. However, considering the statistics, the magnitude of the Kuki community's losses is undoubtedly unparalleled. Despite this, the Meitei civilians have 71.42 percent more representation than the Kuki civilians in the Hindustan Times' *news coverage.*

Employing both qualitative and quantitative methods of analyses, the study concludes that the reporting by the Hindustan Times *reiterated the state government's point of view, failed to raise important questions about the statements and policies that seem to have led to this outburst of violence, and did not adequately cover the aftermath of the violence, conditions of people at relief camps or the roles played by both the union and state authorities. By reducing the Manipur conflict to a single protest, the portrayal falls short in adequately informing its readers about the comprehensive array of aspects integral to the situation, thus limiting a thorough comprehension of the conflict's multifaceted nature. Besides that, the study looks into the datelines, photos and editorials and offers valuable media analysis.*

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INTRODUCTION: MANIPUR VIOLENCE OF MAY 2023

Between 3 May and 5 May, Manipur experienced a severe outbreak of ethno-religious, targeted violence, resulting in a loss of at least 73[3] lives in confrontations between the Meitei and the Kuki communities. The death toll has since risen to 175[4]. This violence was followed by a Tribal Solidarity March, organised by the Kuki community in the Churachandpur district of Manipur. This was conducted in response to a Manipur High Court directive, which had called upon the state government to endorse a recommendation to the union government advocating for Scheduled Tribe status to be conferred upon the majority Meitei community.

Manipur is geographically divided into two regions: the Imphal Valley and the Hill Districts. Meiteis, who are predominantly Hindus, constitute 53 percent of Manipur's total population and reside primarily in the Imphal Valley. On the other hand, Kukis are mostly Christians, comprising 26 percent of the population, and are officially classified as Scheduled Tribes within the state. The Kuki communities are primarily concentrated in the Hill districts, along with Nagas, the third-most dominant ethnicity in Manipur, who make up 17 percent of the population.

Though Meiteis are a majority, they occupy only 10 percent of the total land in the state, whereas tribal people, comprising mainly Nagas and Kukis, account for nearly 40 percent of the population and reside primarily in the hill districts that account for nearly 90 percent of Manipur's area. Apart from being the majority, the Meiteis dominate political power in the Manipur Legislative Assembly. Out of 60 seats in the Assembly, 40 are from the Imphal Valley. Manipur has 31 percent reservation for STs in jobs and education.

The Meiteis were not excluded from the Scheduled Tribes List, as they claim; rather, they made a conscious decision not to be included given the superior caste status it claimed historically. When the initial Backward Class Commission sought inputs from each state and union territory for the inclusion of tribes in the Scheduled Tribes (modification) list, the Meitei chose not to include themselves. With the ST status the Kukis received Constitutional protections, like that of Arti-

cle 371C, which prohibited the Meiteis from buying land in the Hill districts. The contested ST status would ensure protection within the Indian Constitution, granting the Meitei community increased access to privileges, reserved government seats and the ability to purchase land in the Hill districts. The court decision led to the Kuki people carrying out a protest march on 3 May 2023. It was reciprocated with road blockades, stone-pelting and the burning of houses. The violence very quickly escalated to killings of people and the destruction of places of worship, which continued for several weeks.

METHODOLOGY

This researcher analysed 30 days of *Hindustan Times*'s coverage of the Manipur violence.

Hindustan Times is Delhi's most circulated English-language daily newspaper. It is also one of the most read and historically preferred morning broadsheets of the elites in New Delhi, where the top executives of the country, including the prime minister, the home minister, the defense minister and the head of the state, the president of India, as well as the Supreme Court, the Parliament, and the National Human Rights Commission are based. Decisions pertaining to the deployment of the armed forces for peacekeeping in conflict situations are also centralised in the city. The ruling political party in Manipur and India, the BJP, and most of the national parties, have their headquarters in New Delhi as well.

The scope of this study encompasses the period from the first day of media coverage, 4 May 2023, through to 2 June 2023 (inclusive of both dates).

Articles were obtained from the Delhi edition of *Hindustan Times* e-newspaper. The study employs both qualitative and quantitative analyses, including all forms of journalistic output, such as news stories, editorials and op-eds on the Manipur conflict, as well as any closely related news items. All pages were examined except the Business, Sports, Education pages and other supplements.

For qualitative analysis, 47 articles were examined over the period of study. This researcher scrutinised content to identify prevailing themes, assess the tone and connotations, and examine the selection and omission

of themes. Additionally, expert interviews were conducted to provide contextual insights and check the accuracy of the reporting.

ANALYSIS

Chart1: Distribution of Manipur Violence Stories

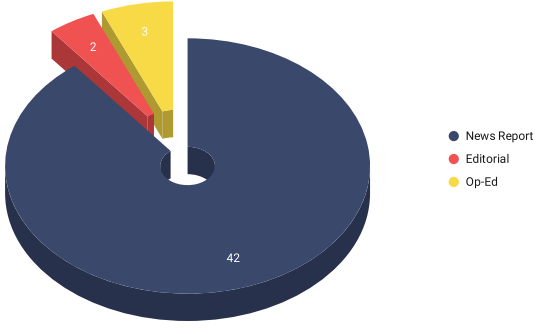


Chart 1: The chart shows the distribution of Manipur violence-related articles in the categories of news reports, editorials, and opinion pieces.

Distant Narratives

Over the course of 30 days following the eruption of violence in Manipur, *Hindustan Times* published 42 news reports, two editorials and three opinion pieces. The datelines of news reports suggest that there was hardly any on-the-ground reporting, and 89 percent of the reporting was done outside the state border. For news stories with two datelines (for example: Imphal/New Delhi), both places have been accounted for separately (Refer to Chart 2).

Chart2: Distribution of the Datelines

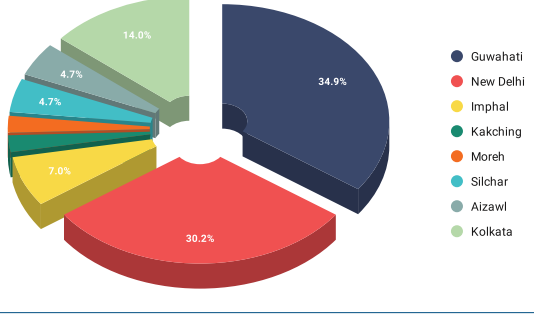


Chart 2: The chart shows the distribution of datelines for news stories with bylines.

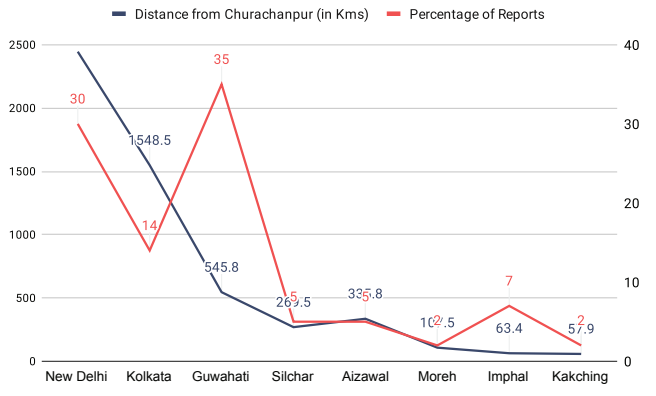
New Delhi is 2,445.4 kilometers from the ground zero point, Guwahati 545.8 KM and Kolkata 1548.5. Together these cities form 79 percent of the news stories—refer to Chart 3 below, where the graph indicates the distance from where the journalists covered the stories from Churachandpur (ground zero of the violence) and the distribution, percentage-wise, of news coverage from each place. Only 11 percent is from Imphal, Kakching and Moreh, the state border. Out of these, apart from one, there is no clear indication that journalists visited the camps in the Hills. There are limited accounts of local reports or firsthand accounts of people from the Hills during the study period.

Besides the absence of journalists going to the ground zero in the period studied, the absence of photojournalists from Delhi's leading newspaper on the ground is also a noticeable fact. Out of 42 news stories, 30 were accompanied by photographs of the Manipur conflict. With two exceptions, all were sourced from news agencies, including Press Trust of India and Agence France-Presse. Only two were credited as HT Photos. The absence of a cutline (photo byline) possibly indicates that *Hindustan Times* did not deploy photojournalists to cover the conflict during the 30-day period, and it came from an anonymous local source.

In conflicts such as this, the absence of journalists on the ground can have significant consequences, resulting in superficial reporting, the omission of sociopolitical contexts and diverse perspectives, a lack of firsthand insights, and, in the worst cases, factual inaccuracies.

Datelines	Distance from Churachanpur (in kms)	Percentage of reports
New Delhi	2445.4	30
Kolkata	1548.5	14
Guwahati	545.8	35
Silchar	269.5	5
Aizawal	335.8	5
Moreh	107.5	2
Imphal	63.4	7
Kakching	57.9	2

Chart 3: Dateline Distance from Ground Zero



Recurring Themes and Points of View (POV)

Since most stories were reported by journalists from places outside Manipur, the reporting shows a heavy dependence on official statements from state and police, army reports and secondary sources. This is at the expense of on-the-ground voices from many sides of the conflict. Out of 42 news reports, only six have the voices of Kuki and Meitei people, with a total of 19 references within these articles. Between 3 May and 2 June, the conflict was featured on the front page of the newspaper on 17 out of the 30 days that were examined. The table presented below illustrates the various points of view that were represented within the 42 reports:

Points of view represented	Number of references
Kuki People	7
Meitei People	12
Union Government	9
State Government	24
Indian Army	12
Police	20
Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)	2
Congress Party	2

10 Kuki MLAs	5
Kuki Politicians (Excluding the MLAs) and Representative Bodies	14
Others (Officials/Reports)	33

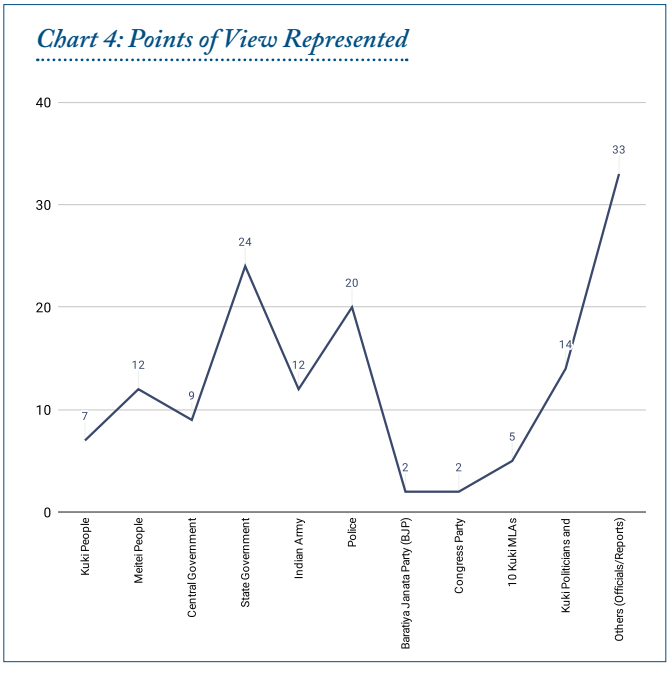


Chart 4: presents a comparison chart of points of view represented in the HT News Reports on the Manipur violence of May 2023.

Overall, the news stories largely carried the POV of three main entities:

- The State Government (24), which includes the chief minister, the state security advisory and other state representatives
- The Police (20)
- The Indian Army (12)

The largest source of information is from other entities (33), which includes "officials" who sought anonymity, "people familiar with the matter" and other experts. Kuki bodies and politicians constitute 14 references. According to the quantitative figures, the Meitei civilians managed to have 71.42 percent more representation than the Kuki civilians.

Steering Clear of Religious References

The *Hindustan Times*, in its reportage during the first 30 days, failed to report on the significant number of church attacks, other than passing mentions from some sources.

The Meitei-dominated regions witnessed the extensive destruction of Kuki churches, homes, and other properties on the night of 3 May. "Churches were the first to be burnt down when violence erupted," an indigenous studies expert from Imphal told this researcher under condition of anonymity. According to him, hundreds of churches, both Meitei and Kuki ones, were torched down across the state. The Archbishop of Imphal, meanwhile, claimed that there were more than ten instances where Catholic churches were attacked, and 249 Meitei churches were burnt down within 36 hours since the start of the violence.[5] These attacks on the churches were also documented by independent factfinders.[6]

Although the attacks on Christian places of worship met all the criteria for newsworthiness, given their magnitude and scale, the lack of coverage in *Hindustan Times* underscores the newspaper's reluctance to engage in any discourse related to this matter.

Reports attributed any attack on Meitei property to the Kuki community, including implications of attacks on Meitei churches. According to the Imphal-based expert, who, fearing persecution, requested anonymity when speaking to the researcher, it is widely known in the Imphal Valley that the attacks were carried out by Arambai Tenggol, a Meitei militant group. "There is a deliberate attempt to create a narrative and confuse people about the nature of the conflict. This has also created misunderstandings between the Kuki Christians and the Meitei Christians," the expert said.

"This is not an ethnic conflict between two communities. This is a clear attack on Christianity, it is religious prosecution. Meitei Christians are also not allowed to worship in public. Many Meitei Christians have also been forced to leave the church and join Sanamahism, the indigenous religion." he added.

Another point of view that did not get represented in the *Hindustan Times* is that of Meitei Christians, who are caught in between in the conflict, with Meitei Hindus and Kuki Christians both not trusting

them enough.[7]

Omission of Sociopolitical Context

The Manipur conflict is deep-rooted and complex. The stories, though seemingly balanced with quotes from various stakeholders, lack depth, and provide only a limited understanding of sociopolitical contexts or the ground-level experiences of the civilians. The first-hand accounts of people from both sides of the conflict are severely under-represented. The reporting is also largely sympathetic to the state in many instances. For instance, in a Page 1 Story on 1 June, headlined "Will ensure refugees get back home: Shah,[8]" the reporter Utpal Parashar writes:

> *The visit is important in a state where ethnic divides run deep and where the local administration has repeatedly failed in quelling violence and building bridges between warring communities. The state government needs to dispel the perception of bias and focus on confidence-building measures and bring both sides to the negotiating table for forging a long-term solution.*

The writing here emphasises the volatility of the "warring communities" and the usage of phrases such as "perception of bias" clearly suggest that bias does not exist, and is, rather, a mere perception.

It is also true the coverage of Home Minister Shah's statement, whose party rules the state of Manipur, and belongs to the same political forces that allegedly supported the Meitei groups, was done as matter of fact, without verifying whether the promises are kept. Shah had promised that the fleeing refugees would be brought back to their homes, as the *Hindustan Times* report said, but the quantitative data on the violence shows the number of Kuki families in the state's capital Imphal after the violence is zero, which did not get mentioned in the coverage during the 30-day period studied.[9]

The missing sociopolitical context in the coverage, however, seems to have been noted later by the Editors' Guild of India (EGI), which carried out a Fact-Finding Mission after complaints regarding coverage came up. Long before the outbreak of violence on 3 May, tensions, particularly between the dominant Meitei community and the marginalised Kuki community, were steadily escalating. "The state government

seems to have facilitated the majority's anger against the Kukis through several seemingly partisan statements and policy measures," states the Editors' Guild of India, in its report on Media's Reportage of the Ethnic Violence in Manipur.

The EGI report elaborates on a series of events that angered the Kuki community. From CM Biren Singh's reference to Kuki tribal people as "illegal immigrants" and "foreigners" to the eviction of Kuki villagers from the forest,[10] the Kuki community is reported to have been left feeling singled-out. The reference to Kuki tribal people as "illegal immigrants" was despite the fact that the decadal census data from 1901 to 2011 does not indicate any significant growth in the tribes' population.

"Drugs is a real issue in the State. The State government blames the Kuki community for poppy cultivation, but the reality is all of them cultivate poppy. In fact, the processing of poppy takes place in the valleys by the Meiteis. The Kukis hardly make any money out of it. But a narrative has been created by the state government and the Valley people that the Kukis are 'poppy cultivators' and 'drug peddlers.' This rhetoric has been strategically employed to vilify the entire Kuki community," Patricia Mukhim, the editor of *Shillong Times* said to this researcher. "The State government seems to have taken little to no action to appease the growing agitation. Governance has failed. The Government exists only for the Valley," she added.

"They have lived together for many years and never fought in history. This is part of a larger agenda, a well-planned and pre-meditated one. After the BJP came into power in Manipur, especially in its second term, there have been a series of partisan statements and policy actions," the Imphal-based expert said.

Reports in the *Hindustan Times* focus on everyday developments without addressing the deeper layers of the issue that would help readers understand the complexity of the conflict, thereby falling short of balanced reporting on the matter. The role of the state government, the implications of the Scheduled Tribe status to Meiteis, land and economic interests in the Hills, the debate about illegal immigration, forest encroachments and poppy cultivations/drugs are some of the omissions that have led to superficial reporting.

Accountability Evasion: Unaddressed Responsibility

The *Hindustan Times* published two editorials over the span of the thirty days. The first was published on 5 May, titled "Quota tweaks must be done with caution."[11] The editorial is consistent with the news reports, addressing the surface-level issue at hand and then going on to discuss the generic theme of reservation, and advising policy makers "to be cautious when attempting to tinker with the affirmative action framework." It concludes with the words: "Reservations should not be cynically doled out. As Manipur shows, it can have unfortunate consequences."

The detached and dispassionate response to loss of lives, and reducing the Manipur conflict to a reservation issue, is a grave editorial shortcoming. Moreover, it is a missed opportunity for newspapers to give its readers an understanding of the complexity of the issue and to take a stand and address it.

After a long period of silence, the second editorial, "In Manipur, a need for building bridges,"[12] published three weeks later, on 26 May, discusses the visit (awaited, at the time) of the home minister Amit Shah and the necessity of intervention. The editorial surfaced after a fresh spate of violence hit Manipur on 25 May. This was followed by Shah's first public statement of his visit, a week later. The editorial expresses how important this visit was, while ignoring the silence of the Union government until Shah's announcement.

The Manipur violence was the worst of its kind, in recent times, in India. Despite the significant number of lives lost and the destruction of property and places of worship, there was complete silence from the prime minister's office over the 30 days that were examined. One would hope that the press would take notice of this fact. The *Hindustan Times* failed to report the prime minister's silence towards the issue, or even ponder over it in its editorials.

After several visits to the relief camps in the Hills, Mukhim notes that the state's chief minister had not paid a single visit to any of these camps. She describes the conditions in the camps as "indescribable," with individuals crowded together and facing shortages of essential supplies. The reporting by the *Hindustan Times* made no attempts to de-escalate the ongoing conflict or address accountability in this way. Besides faithfully reporting the state government's point of view, the

newspaper failed to raise important questions about the partisan statements and policies that seem to have led to this outburst of violence. Furthermore, the newspaper did not cover the aftermath of the violence, conditions of people at relief camps and the roles played by both the union and state authorities.

Local Media Dynamics during the Conflict

Upon receiving several petitions and a written complaint from the Indian Army's 3rd Corps headquarters, the Editors Guild of India sent an independent fact-finding team to investigate the concerns related to local reporting of the Manipur conflict. Some of its major findings[13] include challenges faced by journalists that compromised their reporting standards. One-sided reports emerged due to the absence of cross-checks and monitoring by editors, exacerbated by the communication blockade imposed by the government. According to the report, the internet ban hindered journalists' ability to communicate internally and with sources, pushing them to rely heavily on the state government's narrative, which, under the chief minister, had become narrowly focused on the majority Meitei community.

Furthermore, the fact-finding team found that the Meitei media had evolved into a collective entity during the conflict and adopted a shared narrative to avoid escalating tensions further. However, this practice, rooted in past insurgencies, limited its ability to provide a balanced view. The media's vilification of security forces, particularly the Assam Rifles, lacked verification and contributed to a divided state apparatus along ethnic lines. The report further concludes that the leadership's partisan stance during the conflict negatively impacted governance, fostering distrust among the tribal population.

CONCLUSION

During the period under study, the *Hindustan Times* demonstrated a tendency towards surface-level reporting, with the vast majority of its reports being done hundreds of kilometres away from the national capital, and the headquarters of the neighbouring states, and so on. Its failure at addressing deeper layers of the issue or promoting de-escalation raises important questions about journalistic responsibility. Addi-

tionally, the absence of efforts to hold to account the parties involved in the conflict, coupled with a lack of scrutiny of partisan statements and policies, results in a rather simplistic portrayal of the Manipur conflict as one that erupted out of a single protest. Limited points of view of key stake holders, like the people of the Hills, and the careful omission of religious references, led to imbalanced reporting. When hundreds of people were killed and religious places destroyed, the editorial pages were not proportionate to the crisis faced by the people on the ground. The coverage overall underscores a missed opportunity for conducting a critical and ethical journalistic inquiry.

The media's sudden awakening and its newfound interest regarding the long-neglected Kuki struggle occurred after more than two months since the violence began. This was a reaction to a leaked and highly circulated video on social media on 19 July, in which three Kuki women were stripped naked and molested by a mob of Meitei men. This video marked a turning point in media coverage and engagement with this enduring issue. It is noteworthy that the video of the Kuki women being molested took place in the first few days of the violence in May, when the national capital's largest-read English newspaper had not sent its journalists to ground zero of the violence, the very period of the quantitative research of this study. It makes one wonder whether, had the video not been somehow leaked on social media, and shocked the conscience of people, the press would still have been in the limbo it was in. The *Hindustan Times* carried multiple editorials following the uproar on social media after the video, along with coverage of the first address by the prime minister on the issue since 3 May. In the subsequent days, the *Hindustan Times* allocated dedicated pages, titled "Manipur Spotlight," to covering the conflict. It took a horrific video, shot during the initial days of the violence, to surface for the newspaper to give the issue the attention it deserved. However, this, too, was short-lived.

Heightened scrutiny, an emphasis on-the-ground reporting, and a commitment to deeper analysis in media reporting is crucial to fostering a more comprehensive understanding of conflicts and their implications. As we navigate the complexities of conflicts such as the one in Manipur, it is imperative for the media to not only report events from on the ground, and listen to the multiple stakeholders, but also to critically engage with the underlying issues and their gravity.

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DAINIK JAGRAN'S COVERAGE OF THE 2020 FEBRUARY DELHI VIOLENCE

/ SHIREEN AZAM

ABSTRACT

This case study examines coverage of the Delhi violence of 2020—the worst violence the national capital had seen since the anti-Sikh riots in 1984—leading to the loss of 53 lives, and thousands displaced, a majority of whom were Muslim. The study focuses on Dainik Jagran, *India's most widely read Hindi newspaper. It uses quantitative and qualitative analysis to look at how the newspaper presented the riots as one whose perpetrators were largely Muslims and whose victims were largely Hindu, despite official figures showing disproportionately higher Muslim casualties. The paper questions how such an inversion was made possible.*

This case-study provides crucial concepts to understand how state-leaning media is able to create an inversion of truth about factual events. Even without outright fake news, a calculated web of avoidance, suppression, buying time and sensationalising creates new truths for the public. It studies points of view represented, coverage of victims, negative and positive associations that suggest a staggering amount of media bias in the paper's coverage, including its consistent casual association of the violence to the anti-CAA-NRC pro-

tests, without the presence of any reportage to suggest such a link, even in its own pages. (Even before the violence, it had pitched the protests as inherently violent.) Further, the paper demonstrated efforts to humanise police inaction by portraying them as "helpless," and showed bias towards BJP leaders—in the phase studied in the aftermath of the violence, for instance, it carried 45 articles that could be said to support the ruling BJP and the Hindu community, in contrast to 18, for the Opposition and the Muslim community. The coverage presents Muslims as rioters, and almost never as victims of the violence. When it comes to the riot victims too, this bias is evident. Mention of riot victims when they are Hindus is 32, while it is only five when the riot victims are Muslims, in spite of the majority of the victims being Muslims.

During the peak three days of the violence, the riots did not make it to Dainik Jagran*'s top story on its front page; therefore, if one were to try to understand the state of Delhi from India's largest newspaper on the main days of the violence, one would not be aware of the scale and intensity of the violence. The study concludes that all of these actions created groundwork for the police to arrest protesters from Shaheen Bagh without evidence, as well as contributing to an inversion of the truth about who caused, and who suffered, in the Delhi violence.*

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DELHI VIOLENCE AND THE MEDIA

Fifty-three people lost their lives in the Delhi violence of February 2020, the worst spate of violence India's national capital has seen since 1984. Ground reports and videographic evidence during the days of the violence did not show the Delhi Police's role in a favourable light; they were held responsible for inaction at best, and collusion with rioters at worst. A chilling video showed policemen forcing severely injured Muslim men to sing the national anthem as they prodded them with lathis. One of them, Faizan, 23 years old, died in police custody two days later. Reports in independent and international media showed the police standing by as Muslim establishments were torched,[1] Hindu mobs welcoming the police with anti-Muslim slogans,[2] the police egging on Hindu mobs to throw stones at Muslims,[3] sometimes even picking and throwing stones.[4] Official estimates verified that the brunt of the violence in the so-called "communal riots" was unevenly faced by different communities. In an affidavit it filed in the court on 21 March 2019, the Delhi Police gave a list of the people killed during the violence: 40 were Muslims and 12 were Hindus, and 1 a police officer (also Hindu).

Three months later, India's home minister Amit Shah publicly accepted[5] a report that described the violence as "well pre-planned and organized manner executed attacks in a targeted manner on the Hindu community."[6] The report said that "the Hindu community was totally unaware about the attacks while the attackers belonging to the Muslim community meticulously planned." Over the next few months, the Delhi Police, controlled by and answerable to Shah, arrested numerous activists who had taken part in the protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act earlier that year. The Delhi violence had been successfully framed as anti-Hindu violence, with Muslims, or sympathisers of the Muslim community, as the main perpetrators.

How is such an inversion of truth possible in today's India? What are the discourses through which this inversion is legitimised and made "believable"? This paper attempts a systematic study of India's most widely read Hindi newspaper, *Dainik Jagran*. Even as official figures show disproportionately high Muslim casualties, the newspaper presented the violence as one whose perpetrators were mainly Muslims, and whose victims were mainly Hindu. Importantly, outright fake news

only comprised a small portion of how this inversion was made possible. How can something as indisputable as the number of people who died be inverted? This paper attempts to take apart and analyse the components that made this possible.

METHODOLOGY

This researcher analysed thirty days of *Dainik Jagran*'s coverage. Taking 24 February as the first date of coverage of the violence, the study looked at the paper's coverage 15 days before the violence, between 9 and 23 February 2020, and 15 days after the beginning of the violence on 23 February, that is, from 24 February to 9 March 2020. The study first identified all pieces in the paper—reportage, opinion, editorials—that covered the NRC-CAA protests and the violence in Delhi. It proceeded towards a quantitative and qualitative analysis, studying points of view represented, coverage of victims and possible violators, negative and positive associations and sensationalism. These aspects revealed a staggering amount of media bias in *Dainik Jagran*'s coverage.

Both periods are analysed separately, using different criteria. The period before 24 February is studied for the treatment of the CAA-NRC protests, while the period after 24 February is studied for coverage of the violence. Values are studied at an article level. For example, if an article represented both the BJP and Congress's points of view somewhat equally, a number was added to both their columns.

Part 1: Coverage of Anti-CAA protests and priming: 9 February to 23 February

Pre-riots: Anti-CAA-NRC protests as inherently violent

The CAA-NRC protests that started in Delhi and soon spread to other parts of India had been on since December 2019. These opposed the BJP's discriminatory amendments to India's Citizenship Act, which made Muslims more vulnerable to statelessness.[7] The protests were peaceful and asserted the equality and non-discrimination enshrined in the Constitution. After the Delhi police attacked students at the campus of the Jamia Milia Islamia on 15 December 2019, a sit-in led by Muslim women started in Shaheen Bagh, and became the most-

well-known site and the main symbol of the protests. Various similar sit-ins erupted across small and big towns in India, for example at the Bilal Bagh in Bengaluru and the Kadru Bagh in Ranchi.

A key trope of *Dainik Jagran*'s coverage was the casual association of the violence to the anti CAA-NRC protests in Delhi, without any existing reportage to corroborate such a link, even in its own pages. The protests were depicted in an overwhelmingly negative tone, and as inherently violent, even before the violence in Delhi started. Over the next few months, the Delhi Police mimicked a similar narrative and arrested anti-CAA activists, using questionable evidence.[8] The analysis below will demonstrate how mainstream media coverage contributed to legitimising such actions by the police.

From 9 to 23 February, *Dainik Jagran* widely covered stories about CAA-NRC and the protests. These made it to the front page on 11 of the 15 days studied, and there were 73 articles during this time period. The table below shows the points of view that were represented in the articles:

	POVs directly supporting union government or the BJP	POVs of pro-protestors/ citizens who support CAA	POVs of Anti-CAA-NRC protestors	POVs of opposition parties	POVs belittling opposition parties for their opposition to CAA-NRC
Number of articles	25	10	9	7	9

Table 1: Comparison of point of views that received coverage

Note: The analysis is done at an article level: if an article mentioned two point of views at equal footing, then both have been counted.

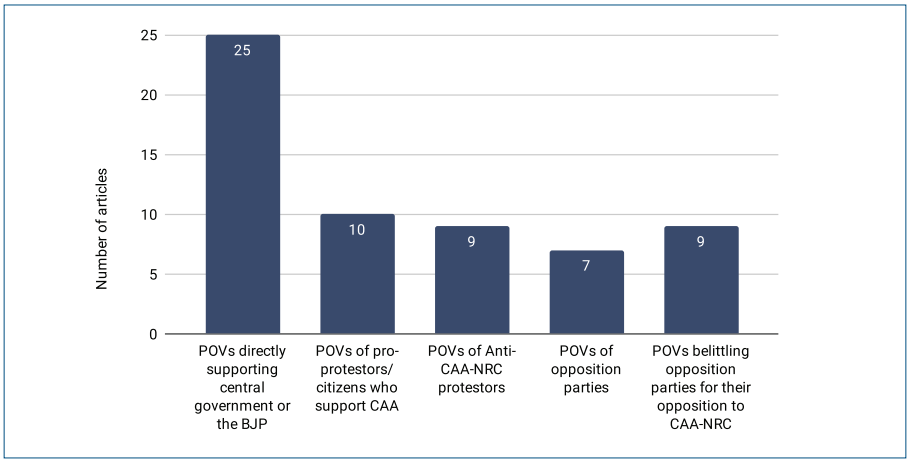


Chart 1: Comparison of points of view that received coverage

Chart 1 shows that 25 articles had points of views directly praising, supporting or defending the union government or the BJP for its decisions regarding CAA-NRC. These included reportage, opinion and editorial pieces. Six of these were on the front page. Even though the CAA-NRC issue and protests were constantly mentioned (in 73 articles over the 15-day period), only nine articles could be said to have contained the protestors' points of view.

The next section shows how, even among these articles, more than half were accompanied by negative associations with the protests, and two more contained a rebuttal from counter-protestors supporting the CAA-NRC. It can be said that even though the CAA-NRC protests were constantly spoken of, very few articles included the points of view of protestors. Most of those that did were accompanied by rebuttals and negative associations. No articles representing protestors' points of view made it to the front page.

Importantly, the points of view of counter-protestors in support of CAA-NRC got nearly equal coverage to anti-CAA-NRC protestors, who came out on the streets in thousands. This is remarkable, since counter-protestors in support of CAA-NRC were a countable few and hardly comparable in terms of their strength. In contrast to anti-CAA-NRC protestors, every time *Dainik Jagran* reporters spoke with pro-CAA people, they highlighted their points of view, giving the impression for people accessing the newspaper that two groups with equal

strengths were protesting. This showed a sinister pattern; humanity was allowed to only one kind of people. The newspaper's editorial choices framed the anti-CAA-NRC protestors with deep suspicion, while anyone who opposed it was given a holistic voice.

While 25 articles showed the points of view of the BJP, seven articles conveyed the points of view of members of opposition parties. Five out of these seven articles included a rebuttal from BJP's points of view as well. Further, opposition members were more likely to be widely covered if they spoke against their parties or coalition allies, or in favour of the BJP government. Opposition members made it to the front page only when they supported CAA-NRC. For example, Congress leaders CP Joshi and Shiv Sena leader Uddhav Thackrey speaking in favour of CAA-NRC were sensationally titled on the front page, while a legislation in Puducherry against CAA was buried in a single column on page 5, and written in a matter-of-fact tone.

Mentions of Anti-CAA Protests

Chart 2 shows a comparison between the number of articles that conveyed positive, negative and neutral connotations about the protests. While there are only three articles that mention positive connotations such as democracy, rights, non-violence and the Constitution along with mentions of the protest, there are 50 articles about the protests containing negative connotations—for instance, representing them as misled, unnecessary, wrong, as a nuisance because of effects of traffic or road blocks, or as dangerous, violent, anti-national and having terror links. Four articles could be said to have a neutral tone without positive or negative terms. Further, all three articles that conveyed any kind of positive connotations about the protests included a negative mention of the protests as well.

	Positive connotations (democracy, rights, non-violence, constitution)	Negative connotations (misled, nuisance, traffic, violent, Anti-national)	Neutral connotations
Number of articles about Anti-CAA-NRC protests	3	50	4

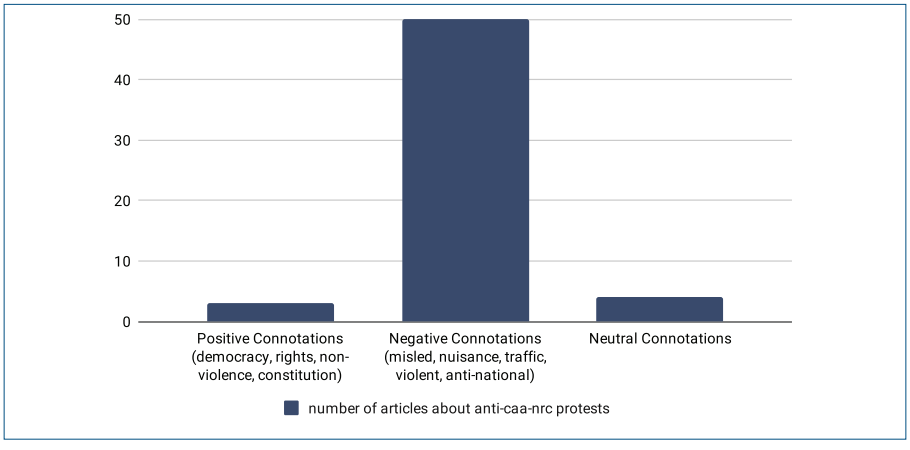


Chart 2: Comparison of positive, negative and neutral connotations in Dainik Jagran's coverage of anti-CAA-NRC protests.
Note: analysis has been done at an article level in this paper. If an article contained positive and negative mentions, value has been added to both.

	Traffic, Road	Misled / Wrong / Unnecessary/ Nuisance	Dangerous /Violent /Terror links/ Anti-national	Other
Number of articles with various negative connotations about Anti-CAA-NRC protest	14	5	32	4

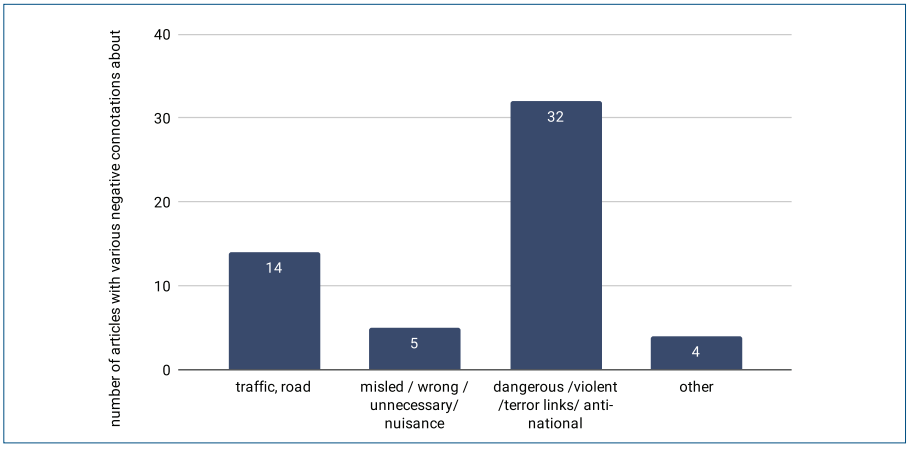


Chart 3: Negative connotations about anti-CAA-NRC protests

It was overwhelmingly clear that *Dainik Jagran*'s reportage was slanted in terms of depictions of the anti-CAA-NRC protests as misled, a nuisance or spoken of in the context of "traffic." The attachment of negative connotations to an event, or "degradation," is a form of media bias, and affects how readers perceives the trustworthiness of persons depicted.

By contrast, protests in favour of CAA-NRC were only mentioned positively. Even when there was a call for a "chakka-jam," or a huge rally, *Dainik Jagran* did not speak of the traffic, or suggest that the counter protests were dangerous. The photo of tricolour was highlighted in pro-CAA protests and not in anti-CAA-NRC protests, even though the latter was heavily charecterised by its use of the Indian flag.

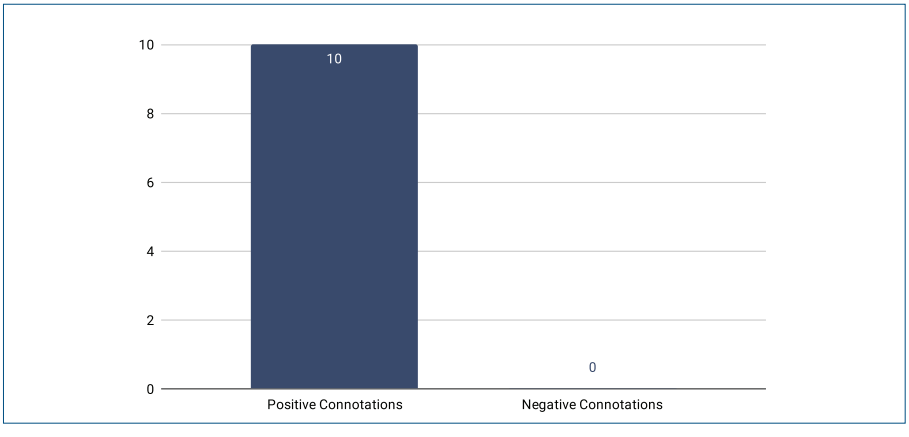


Chart 4: Comparison of positive, negative and neutral connotations in Dainik Jagran's coverage of protests in favour of CAA-NRC

Priming: The notion of anti-CAA protests as inherently violent

Even before the violence on 24 February, *Dainik Jagran* had already done the ground work of pitching the protest as inherently violent. The protests were framed as dangerous and violent, without actual reference to any incidents of violence by the protestors. The protests, organised across the country from December onwards, had remained peaceful. While there had been reported instances of violence breaking out in this period, they at most involved burnt buses, and did not involve any damage to human life. At the same time, 20 Muslims, some of whom were not even protesting, had been shot dead in Uttar Pradesh, and

two in Mangaluru. On 14 December 2019, in Aligarh, policemen used tear-gas shells within the university campus and lathi-charged students, grievously injuring them and amputating one person's hand, and there were additional reports of custodial torture.[9] In separate instances in January 2020, two men arrived at the Shaheen Bagh site, aiming guns at protesters.

Even as anti-CAA protests remained peaceful and had, in fact, faced the brunt of brute state violence, *Dainik Jagran*'s coverage depicts them as the central cause of violence. This is visible on 24 February, where the headline declared the start of the violence by stating "Phir, (Again), CAA Protest Gets Violent." This priming of the protest as innately violent was carried out over months, by sensationalising acts such as the burning of a bus, or traffic jams, and by underplaying the injuries of protestors and loss of human lives. On 16 February 2020, a video showing evidence of police officers beating students in the Jamia Milia library surfaced online.[10] Even in the face of crude evidence of the police beating up students, *Dainik Jagran*'s coverage gave ample space for questioning protestors themselves.

By the time the violence in Delhi began on 23 February 2020, *Dainik Jagran*'s coverage had resorted to dog-whistling. "All problems are because of the Muslims who did not go to Pakistan at the time of Partition: Giriraj," said a report on 22 February. The report quoted the union minister, Giriraj Singh, without framing it as a dangerous opinion, nor providing a refutation. A report on 23 February quotes a BJP leader asking for a repeat of Gujarat 2002. *Dainik Jagran* titles the call for genocide a "controversial statement," and ends the report plainly noting that more than a thousand people died in Gujarat riots, most of them minorities. There is no refutation. The leading editorial on the same day said that the Shaheen Bagh protests are "testing the patience of the nation."

Part II. Violence: 24 February – 9 March 2020.

The analysis below looks at articles from 24 February to 9 March. It selects articles about Delhi violence, and CAA and NRC, identifying a total of 178 articles.

Forty-five articles could be said to support BJP ministers or the

union government. They either spoke on behalf of, explicitly favoured or defended, or explained the points of view of the BJP. In contrast, 12 and six articles, respectively, explained the points of view of the Congress and AAP. Four articles gave space to extremist right-wing groups, such as the RSS, the VHP or the speaker Sri Sri Ravi Krishna, for their points of view regarding the violence.

	POV's speaking on behalf of/ in favour of					
	BJP/Union	AAP/ Delhi state govt	Congress	Other opposition	Nitish Kumar	Hindutva leaders
number of articles	45	12	14	6	2	4

POVs speaking on behalf of/ in favour of different political entities.

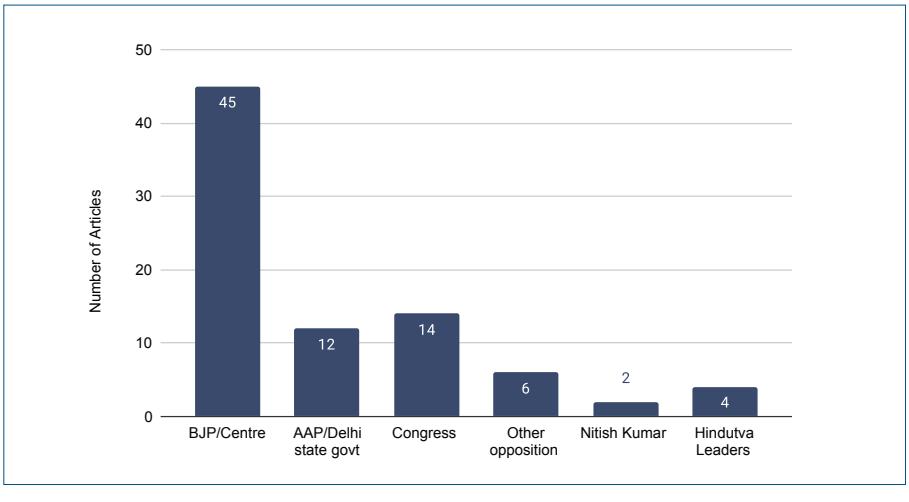


Chart 5: Articles with POVs speaking on behalf of/ in favour of different political parties.
Note: Analysis is done at an article level; if an article conveyed the POV of both the Congress and the BJP, a value has been added to both.
Note: Nitish Kumar has been calculated separately, because his government in Bihar is part of a BJP-coalition, but he spoke against the NRC.

Even as the Delhi police is controlled by the union home ministry, which is overseen by Amit Shah, more articles bashed, criticised or asked questions of the opposition than the union government or the BJP.

	Bashing / Criticising / Asking questions	Critical of opposition
	Critical of the BJP/Union	
Number of articles	12	19

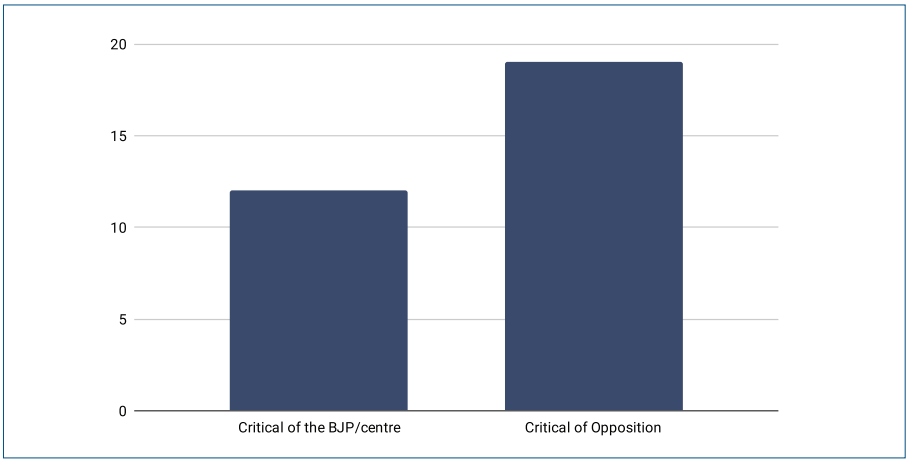


Chart 6: Comparison of number of articles critical of the BJP/union government and opposition parties.

Within the opposition, though, the Congress was criticised the most (in 12 articles), unlike AAP (4 articles), even though the latter was in power in Delhi.

Lack of reportage and "forgetting" the site of the violence

While non-violent protests by anti-CAA protests had gone on for almost three months, it was on 23 February that the violence began—after a crowd led by the BJP leader Kapil Mishra landed at the site of an anti-CAA protest in Jaffrabad. In the presence of a senior police officer, Mishra demanded that the police evict the protestors and threatened violence in case they failed to do so. Soon after Mishra's speech, violence ensued in the area, culminating in communal riots across the city over the next few days. The role of the police—starting from letting Mishra give the speech in their presence, to letting the violence continue—was noted by independent journalists present on the field. On 25 February, the BJP MLA Abhay Verma led a march in East Delhi with the crowd shouting the slogan "shoot the traitors."[11]

Amidst this backdrop, *Dainik Jagran*'s reportage is notable. One can divide the reportage to the first three days of the coverage, where one notices a playing down and obfuscation of facts, and the second phase, where the high number of Muslim casualties is ignored and one particular case of a Hindu victim and a Muslim accused is sensationalised as the main story.

Phase 1: Coverage of 24, 25 and 26 February

Lack of ground reportage: The most striking feature about the main days of the violence is the lack of attention to it in the paper, and especially the dearth of ground reportage. During the peak three days of the violence, the riots did not make it to *Dainik Jagran*'s top story on its front page. This is disconcerting, considering the paper's overt focus on the protests so far, and considering that the violence took place barely ten kilometres from *Dainik Jagran*'s head office.

On the first and main day of the violence, there was just one article on the violence in the entire newspaper. On the second day of violence, there were only four articles on the riots, only two of which were reports about the events that ensued. The third day saw an upsurge of articles, many of them clarifications representing the points of view of the union or the police about police inaction. The first three days of the violence saw 5.6 reports on an average, compared to 8.75 of the next 12 days. Only one ground reporter, Rakesh Kumar Singh, wrote an article with a byline. Both his reports suggested police inaction. Importantly, even though they were the only reports on the biggest spate of violence the national capital has seen in decades, they were buried in the inside pages of the newspaper instead of being the main story or on the front page.

In other words, if one were to understand the state of Delhi from India's largest newspaper on the main days of the violence, one would not know the scale and intensity of the violence. It should be noted that several journalists in Delhi were reporting from the ground during this period, demonstrating evidence of police inaction.

It is very difficult to suppose that the largest newspaper network of the country was not able to get reportage on the events taking place in Delhi. Notably, however, *Dainik Jagran* Publication's Urdu newspaper *Inquilab* (which is geared towards a Muslim audience, unlike *Dainik*

Jagran, and is run from the same office in ITO, Delhi), published a lot of ground-reportage in the same period, with the main story directly linking the mob led by Kapil Mishra to the start of the violence.

The lack of attention by mainstream media overlapped with police inaction and complicity in the violence. The police's inaction in controlling the riot was aided by the lack of pressure from mainstream media organisations such as *Dainik Jagran*, which were preoccupied with Donald Trump's visit even as the capital burned. The news about Trump was hardly important; on the main day of the violence, the main story was about the Ahmedabad stadium being "ready" for Trump, and how grand it is. (The stadium was a vanity project in Narendra Modi's name).

The lack of ground reportage on the crucial days of the violence enabled two things: the burial of the details of police inaction and complicity, and public forgetting regarding where the violence began, how it began and who began it.

While reportage on the main days of violence was missing from *Dainik Jagran*'s pages, over the next days, the forgetting of material evidence and the site of violence was accompanied by insinuations linking the violence to the anti-CAA protests, even though no reportage, even in *Dainik Jagran*'s pages, corroborated this. Reports of police inaction are matched by reports defending the police. While three of the four ground reports on 24 and 25 February mention pro-CAA protests as well as the site from where violence ensued (calling it a clash between pro- and anti-CAA protestors) over the next few days, the mention of pro-CAA protests is completely dropped. In the next 13 days, pro-CAA protests led by Kapil Mishra are not mentioned even once. Mishra's role is reduced to having made an "inflammatory speech" and is also understated.

Humanising of police inaction

At a time that the police should have been held accountable for inaction, and questioned over video evidence of its communal bias, *Dainik Jagran* chose to humanise the police by calling them "helpless," and by centring their death. On 25 February, a critical report ("the situation was such that in the midst of rioters, police kept waiting for orders even to air-fire") was pushed to page 7, while the death of a police person

was centred on the front page.

The study analysed reportage and opinion on the police for a span of 15 days. Articles that only covered routine information about police action were excluded, but attention was paid to criticism and support. It was found that even though several reports and video evidence by independent media showed proof of police inaction and complicity, *Dainik Jagran*'s coverage attempted to balance this impression by defending the police, or humanising their inaction.

The table below shoes that 16 articles contained content that critically mentioned police inaction, while 15 articles defended or humanised the police, either by suggesting that the police had done well and that everything was under control, or by humanising police inaction and portraying them as "helpless" and "overcome." Many of these articles also centred police deaths over civilian deaths (for example, by writing that a police constable and ten people were dead). Ten articles mentioned the death of the policeman Ratan Lal. This centring of police victimhood gave the impression that the police were the victims, instead of holding them accountable.

	Police inaction humanised / narrative of police doing well/ police death centred over civilians	Police inaction
Number of articles	15	16

Phase 2: 28 February Onwards

The second phase of the riot coverage could be said to be from 28 February onwards, when Tahir Hussain was identified as an accused in the murder of Ankit Sharma. After this arrest, news coverage of Delhi violence increased in *Dainik Jagran*'s pages, and was more likely to be the top story. This case was heavily sensationalised and used as an example to represent the riots. While Tahir Hussain was presented as perpetrator and Ankit Sharma as the victim, analysis of accompanying coverage shows that this is also a proxy for a Muslim being a riot creator and Hindu being a riot victim.

The table below shows that while BJP leaders and pro-CAA protests were mentioned in 14 articles in the context of the Delhi violence,

Muslim leaders or individuals and anti-CAA protests were together mentioned in 58 articles over 15 days. Keep in mind that the ratio of deaths of Hindus to Muslims is 9:43.

	Mentions of BJP leaders, Pro-CAA protests, or any other hindu leader in context of Delhi violence	Mentions of Anti-CAA protests, or muslim leaders/ individuals in context of Delhi violence
Number of articles	14	58

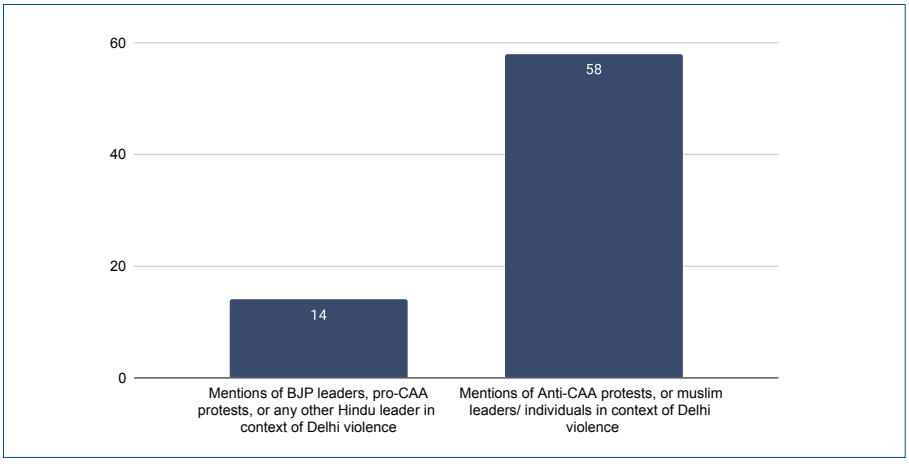

60
40
20
0
14
58
Mentions of BJP leaders, pro-CAA protests, or any other Hindu leader in context of Delhi violence
Mentions of Anti-CAA protests, or muslim leaders/ individuals in context of Delhi violence

Chart 7: Comparison of mentions

A deeper look at the 14 articles show another layer of bias towards BJP leaders. As mentioned earlier, pro-CAA protests are only mentioned in the first two days of the coverage and never again. Out of the 11 articles that mention Kapil Mishra, Pravesh Verma and Anurag Thakur in the context of inciting riots, nine are quotes, either from a Supreme Court judge or an allegation of a member of the opposition. *Dainik Jagran* itself does not mention pro-CAA protests as the truth or sensationalise them. In fact, the newspaper strives to do the opposite, framing what is said about them as an allegation. Even among these nine articles, four include refutations, defence and humanising of these BJP leaders. In fact, in a piece on 5 March, on Harsh Mander's petition for an FIR on BJP leaders being rejected, *Dainik Jagran* uses its editorial intervention to put a special box in the middle of the article. Called "Jagran vichar," it questioned Harsh Mander's role and his decision to petition the courts to act against inflammatory speeches.

Dainik Jagran also allowed the controversial union minister Anurag Thakur to deny his role in the riots without any fact-checking of his statement. On 2 March, the newspaper ran a column with the headline, "Desh ke gaddaron … jaisa bhashan maine nahi diya: Anurag." Not only does Thakur get the space to say that he never said the slogan "Desh ke gaddaron ko, goli maaro salo ko"—Shoot the traitors of the country, but *Dainik Jagran* does not fact-check or refute him, thereby essentially quoting fake news. In fact, the piece goes on to quote Thakur's comments about the budget and the economy, effectively normalising him and his actions.

In sharp contrast is *Dainik Jagran*'s treatment of the other side. The link between Shaheen Bagh and the violence is first formed not in a report, but in an editorial on 26 February. After that, the newspaper consistently and freely connects anti-CAA protests to the riots (31 times). This is, once again, despite the complete lack of any evidence of it in its own papers. Unlike Kapil Mishra, whose name is hardly mentioned as a rioter, (and as an allegation, if ever), even though he was found at the site of the start of the violence instigating the rioters, the names of Tahir Hussain, Ishrat Jahan and other Muslims are deemed as rioters from the first mention, based on police statements alone.

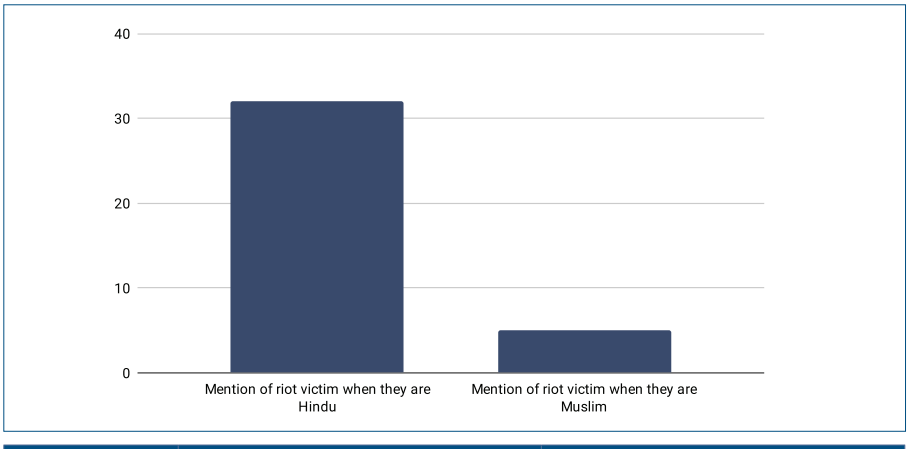
Further, *Dainik Jagran*'s attempts at "Muslim-ising" the violence is clear from the fact that another set of 11 articles connecting Muslim leaders and organisations who have no material relation to the violence with the riots. Some of them do not even live in Delhi (such as Asaduddin Owaisi and Waris Pathan). There were insinuations of involvement by Pakistan's ISI in two articles, and even the Islamic State in one article. These insinuations did the task of characterising the violence as Muslim-led.

Victims

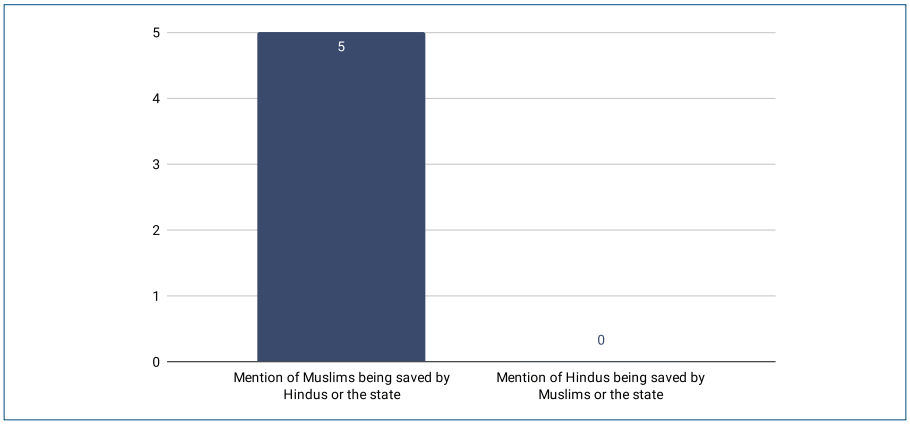
While Muslims are exclusively presented as rioters, they are almost never projected as victims of the riots. There are only five articles that mention Muslim victims and each and every one of them is a story of them being saved, either by Hindu neighbours or the state giving compensation (in the case of the Border Security Force constable Anees Khan). Thus, Muslim victims are only mentioned in the context of Hindus or the state saving them. Hindus only "save" Muslims from

riots; there is no sense of who was killing Muslims, requiring them to be saved in the first place. In contrast, there are 32 articles with Hindu victims (including ten on the constable Ratan Lal). There are zero stories about Muslim saviours.

	Mention of riot victim when they are Hindu	Mention of riot victim when they are Muslim
Number of articles	32	5



	Mention of Muslims being saved by Hindus or the state	Mention of Hindus being saved by Muslims or the state
Number of articles	5	0



It is also interesting that while *Dainik Jagran* makes Ankit Sharma a pivotal point for symbolising Hindu deaths, it does not mention Rahul

Solanki, who was also a young man killed in the riots, and whose family was very vocal about it and covered it widely in independent media. Incidentally, Solanki's family had publicly blamed Kapil Mishra for inciting the riots.[12] It also has to be noted that while Sharma is a Brahmin, Solanki belonged to a Dalit community. Clearly, not all Hindu hurt is valued the same.

Reported voice vs editorialising

Dainik Jagran's coverage is more likely to editorialise an issue if the accused is Muslim, or part of anti-CAA protests. In contrast, it is more likely to use a neutral reported voice when the accused is a Hindu or belongs to the BJP. Another bias can be found in the adjectives it uses for different actors. Even when an article covers a Congress' leader's allegation against the BJP, for instance, it lampoons the former with its turn of phrase.

On the Congress objecting to a judge's transfer, a *Dainik Jagran* story says, "However, nepotism-ridden Congress party is politicising the routine transfer of the judge." The same article then goes on to humanise the BJP: "The allegations of Congress were answered by Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad himself." The emphasis on the word khud—or himself—for an elected minister doing his job, deifies him. It is visible in reportage on Amit Shah in the aftermath of the Delhi violence as well: "Amit Shah himself gave the advice that…" and so on. In one report quoting Yogi Adityanath, *Dainik Jagran* adds: "Speaking to those who have been creating tensions on the pretext of protesting against CAA, Yogi Adityanath said…."

Dainik Jagran makes very little attempt to hide that it is speaking on behalf of the BJP. By contrast, Kapil Mishra's role in the riots is covered in a strictly reportorial voice with no editorialising, as visible in the following phrases: "Aam Aadmi Party has held the BJP Minister and ex MLA Kapil Mishra responsible for Delhi violence. Aam Aadmi Party has demanded the arrest of Mishra," and so on.

CONCLUSION

In September 2021, a Delhi court, while examining 73 chargesheets filed by the Delhi police about the February violence, remarked that

the standard of investigation was very poor. A report examining some of the chargesheets showed farcical FIRs, dubious witness statements and a lack of evidence.[13] However, several persons arrested under these flimsy charges continue to be denied bail. Speaking on behalf of the BJP, belittling the opposition, defending and platforming the BJP's accused leaders, sensationalising one case of a Hindu victim while actively avoiding larger data of casualties—all of these actions by the media created groundwork for the police to arrest protesters from Shaheen Bagh without any evidence. This case study provided crucial concepts to understand how state-leaning media is able to create an inversion of truth about factual events. Even without outright fake news, a calculated web of avoidance, suppression, and sensationalising creates new truths for the public.

Daninik Jagran created the inversion of the truth of the Delhi violence through four steps, which might be called the techniques of inversion of truth. First, the avoidance of outrage, wherein it initially avoided coverage of events with large-scale casualties of minorities in real time. This avoids conveying the "shock" of violence, and minimises the potential outrage a newspaper's "public" might feel at the event. Second, the suppression of ground reportage, even by its own reporters, which helped in building the ground for a lack of facts conveyed about the event. Suppression can happen either by omission of reportage, or by hiding news in inside pages or giving it unattractive headlines. Thirdly, buying time for the state—essentially, this allows the newspaper to buy time for a more centralised narrative to emerge: from the police or the government. Finally, the sensationalising of individual actions of minorities: the newspaper then pushes for an overdrive of the police or the government's POV, for example, what happened with Tahir Hussain.

At the heart of these four techniques is the priming of humanity or inhumanity. Even before the beginning of violence, the newspaper primes the readers to think of some people (for instance, Muslims opposing an unjust law) as inherently violent at worst, or a nuisance at best. This prepares the public for an absolute inversion of truth about these people, whom it can only see as aggressors, despite whole numbers saying a different story. This is how a riot that killed mostly Muslims can be absorbed and retained in the public conscience as an anti-Hindu riot. This paper showed how the newspaper *Dainik Jagran*, through an over-

whelming bias in its coverage, contributed to an inversion of the truth about who caused—and who suffered—in the Delhi violence.

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PRABHAT KHABAR'S REPORTING ON THE ENCOUNTER KILLING OF AN ADIVASI PERSON IN JHARKHAND IN JUNE 2021

/ Sushmita

ABSTRACT

This case study analyses the media reporting of an encounter killing in Jharkhand. Beginning with a historical and contemporary understanding of such killings in India, and the media's normalisation and dehumanisation that accompanies them, this report delves into the specific coverage of the encounter death of Bramhadev Singh, a 25-year-old Adivasi man from a remote village in Jharkhand. The study conducts analysis of the coverage by Prabhat Khabar, *a Hindi-language newspaper. The quantitative study analyses the space given to this incident, while the qualitative analysis looks at the unfolding of the event beyond what was reported, the relevant questions media could have asked, media bias and other aspects.*

It concludes that most reports do not contain quotes from villagers, family members and others, and appear to be a modified version of police press releases. Nor do the articles dig deeper, or seem to be asking questions about the necessity and relevance of such acts; in general, the paper tended to have persistent coverage when the news was sensation-

al—involving corruptions and scandals, for instance. But in cases involving extra judicial killings of Adivasis, similar critical reporting was missing. The history of such incidents in Jharkhand is also indicative of the fact that the press and media generally approve of encounters, providing a morale boost to the police to do such acts repeatedly.

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"ENCOUNTERS" – DEFINITION AND BRIEF HISTORY

The killing of an Adivasi man at the hands of the police or by the paramilitary in central or eastern India is, more often than not, termed an "encounter"—a euphemism for extrajudicial executions by law-enforcement agencies in the name of self-defence. These acts, termed encounters or *muthbhed*,[1] are described as actions taken in retaliation to violent provocation. The phrasing used often describes targets as being "gunned down,"[2] "felled," "eliminated," "neutralised," "exterminated" or "wiped out," with a cache of weapons next to them.

On 12 June 2021, one such encounter took place in the Kuku-Piri jungles in Latehar, Jharkhand. The account, provided by an anonymous source in the Central Reserve Police Force, was readily published in print media. It was reported that a body of a slain Maoist, along with at least four fire-arms was found (a familiar motif in reports on encounters). A few hours later, it was declared a case of "mistaken identity," wherein security forces were prompted to retaliate, after a group of Adivasi men hunting on the occasion of Sarhul had inexplicably fired at them.[3] While Bramhadev Singh died, the Latehar Superintendent of Police went on to praise the police force for its acumen and restraint in the face of provocation—a version duly noted in the report. While local papers had carried the initial reports, digital-media reports, such as from *Gaurilankeshnews*, and social-media posts raised questions about police policy.[4]

Encounter killings have been gradually normalised in India, since colonial rule. In an article titled "Fake Encounters: Story from Andhra Pradesh," N Venugopal traces the history of such killings.

Killing people in cold-blood and describing the incident as "an encounter where an exchange of fire took place at the end of which the police discovered some dead bodies" dates back to the early part of the last century. Perhaps it was the British who invented this devious method of killing. A well-known instance of a so-called encounter took place in May 1924 when Alluri Sitarama Raju, who led a tribal rebellion against the British, was killed. However, latter-day research explored the reality and showed that he was caught and killed in cold-blood without any exchange of fire. Later, during the 1940s, more than 3,000 cadres

and other persons who participated in the Telangana peasant armed struggle (1946-51) were also killed in "encounters," most of them being fake. While it was the Nizam's police that used the liquidating method during 1946-48, two-thirds of these encounter killings took place under military rule and subsequent civil rule of the government of India between 1948 and 1951.

In another article entitled "Why do the police use deadly force? Explaining Police Encounters in Mumbai," the author Jyoti Belur argued that:

> *Police use of deadly force in India is peculiarly referred to as encounters not just in police jargon, but as part of everyday discourse, in the media and by the public. The term encounter refers to a specific type of police contact – a spontaneous, unplanned 'shoot- out' between the police and alleged criminals, in which the criminal is usually killed, with few or no police injuries (Human Rights Watch 2009). However, the police 'cover story' (Hunt and Manning 1991) from official sources and cited in the media is always the same. This raises the suspicion that it is a cover-up for facts that might not be legally defensible or permissible.*

Encounters have long been used as a political tool for control, fear and for the dehumanisation and demonisation of dissidents as well as marginal groups. Even in supposedly strong democracies such as the United Kingdom, academics such as P Scraton and T Jefferson found that such dehumanisation seeks to construct an "authoritarian consensus" among the "respectable majority," which allows them and the government to authorise or condone certain coercive measures.

The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) is the government agency responsible for collecting and analyzing, crime data as defined by the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Special and Local Laws (SLL). In its annual report on crime in India, the NCRB has a section dedicated to "Complaints against police personnel and human rights violations." This section records police excesses, including illegal detentions, extortion, torture and fake encounters. Since the Crime in India report of 2017, what used to be called "fake encounter killing," before 2016, is now placed under Section 16 A and labelled as an "encounter killing."

These records, it is expected, register the acts as violations of the law, by the upholders of law. Moreover, this section is distinct from deaths under police or judicial custody. A closer look at the methodology of its computation reveals some glaring holes. The records are collated only on the basis of registered FIRs, record only those sections with the gravest possible punishment (even if other sections are invoked in the FIR) and include categories within custodial deaths that remain undefined as "Others," amid a flurry of data. The Crimes in India report does not record these as atrocities committed against Scheduled Tribes by the security agencies. Up till 2015, there was a separate section on "disappearance of persons." While this section disappears, another undefined section called "others" appears. How comprehensively these reports record cases of such killings is a matter for further study.

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) also maintains a record of the complaints received, acted upon, verdicts pronounced, compensation recommended and status of implementation of recommendations in its Annual Reports. Here, the categories include "Alleged Fake Encounter," "Custodial Death (Police)," Custodial Death (Judicial)," "Death in Police Encounter," "Death due to Police Firing," "Attempted Murder" and "Murder" and the definitions of each remain unavailable. It is worth noting that these records and classifications, independent of the records maintained by the NCRB, are solely on the basis of the complaints received by the apex body on human rights in the country. The reports submitted by the Ministry of Home Affairs to the parliament do not always correspond with those by other agencies of the state.

According to the information under Right to Information Act, between 2015 and 2019, the National Human Rights Commission received a total number of 211 fake encounters carried out by the police. Compensation was only provided in 25 cases; however, no punishment was awarded to the personnel. Uttar Pradesh accounted for an alarming 44.55 percent—or 794 cases—of the cases registered across all states. Following Uttar Pradesh, the next five states that account for the highest number of fake encounter cases are Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Assam, Jharkhand and Manipur.

The 2017 case of the killing of Motilal Baske—a worker in the Giridih district in Jharkhand who was initially described using the term "Maoist"—was found to be fake.[5] Baske's family was able to pro-

vide several documents and evidence of his identity, puncturing the Jharkhand police's narrative of him being a CPI (Maoist) operative. Subsequently, a local reporter found himself behind bars for his stories on the Baske case.[6] Meanwhile, Baske's family awaits justice, four years after he was killed by the Jharkhand Police.[7]

Days before Bramhadev Singh's killing, a woman in Geedam, Chhatisgarh was gunned down by the District Reserve Guard. On 31 May, the Dantewada police press release claimed that a Maoist was gunned down during an encounter and that her body was recovered along with weapons, explosives and essentials usually carried by Maoists. This was bolstered with claims that she was identified by surrendered Maoists as being someone with a heavy reward on her head.[8] The police's version included the claim of an encounter between opposing forces, the recovery of a body, along with weapons and other objects, and identification by sources under the custody of the police, and a reward. This narrative was countered, as it appeared an entire village had witnessed her being dragged away by the DRG. Furthermore, there were visible marks of sexual violence and mutilation on her body.[9] The news coverage was limited and did not find space in major news agencies. A month later, the killing of Buddeshwar Oraon in Jharkhand was hailed as part of security agencies' successful operations; the body was supposedly found after a gun-battle, alongside weapons, IEDs, literature and essential items, and there was a large bounty on his head.[10]

Encounters and The Law

The recent orders, following the judicial enquiry, into the Edesmetta and the Sarkeguda encounters in Chhattisgarh are marked by delayed reporting in mainstream print media. Discussions on the operations, the intelligence used for its execution, the operation command during combing, area-domination exercises and jurisdiction in these areas are seldom undertaken in the public domain. These questions remain unanswered in the reporting that produces police press releases. The experiences of gram sabhas, the sarpanch, local bodies, panchayats and civil-society groups are rarely included. As the term "encounter" has found its way into everyday language, the voices of those at the receiving end of the violence are muffled by the rhetoric of national security. Struggles for land and resources, protests against environmental degradation, assertions of cultural identity and demands for dignity are over-run by

fears that allegations of violations would "defame and demoralise" the jawans.

The Status of Policing in India Report, 2018 published by Common Cause and CSDS after they conducted survey of 15,563 people across 22 Indian states and Union Territories, revealed that one in two people condone police violence, with a large section of police personnel in favour of retaliatory action over following the legal process.[11] Prejudice against Muslims, Dalits and Adivasis extended to the police personnel, in tandem with reports of increasing incidents of violence against minorities and SC-STs in the country.[12] [13] [14]

Placing these reports in context, the history of judicial interventions to define these actions and their consequences have come alongside political turbulence. The long history of encounter killings in the two Telugu-speaking states have resulted in frequent interventions in courts.[15] With efforts to scuttle scrutiny into police practices by several governments over the decades, the Bhargava Commission was wound up before investigations into killings of hundreds of people could commence.[16]

The intervention by the retired justice Dilip K Basu, before PN Bhagwati—the Chief Justice at the time—on the basis of newspaper reports and clippings resulted in the DK Basu guidelines for arrests and detentions in 1996.[17] Here, the responsibility of upholding the rule of law was logically provided with concomitant procedures, to ensure that power would not be abused. The judgment said, "Custodial violence, including torture and death in the lock ups, strikes a blow at the Rule of Law, which demands that the powers of the executive should not only be derived from law but also that the same should be limited by law." Following a complaint by the Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee, under the chairpersonship of Justice M Venkatachalaiah, the NHRC sent guidelines for the procedure to be followed in the cases of deaths in police encounters in 1997.[18] These guidelines insisted on the filing of an FIR in the immediate wake of an encounter, that the investigation be conducted immediately and by an independent investigation agency and that compensation be provided if officers are found guilty following an investigation.

Yet, trigger-happy police personnel have been prolific in their careers. For instance, when police personnel were admonished following the *Om Prakash & Ors v. State of Jharkhand* case of 2012, the judgment

stated: "It is not the duty of the police officers to kill the accused merely because he is a dreaded criminal. Undoubtedly, the police have to arrest the accused and put them up for trial. This court has repeatedly admonished trigger happy police personnel, who liquidate criminals and project the incident as an encounter. Such killings must be deprecated. They are not recognized as legal by our criminal justice administration system. They amount to State sponsored terrorism."[19] This came at a time when vigilante forces propped up by police were being questioned.[20] Decades later, these groups were re-organised and renamed, while their activities found greater sanction in the media.[21]

Expanding the guidelines set earlier by the DK Basu judgement and the NHRC, the guidelines set by the Supreme Court of India in 2014 as part of the *PUCL v. State of Maharashtra* case widened the scope of interventions by human-rights agencies and set further procedural requirements for the police post encounters.[22] [23] Meanwhile, this order did not elaborate on ways to hold police personnel accountable for violations. While the pandemic has left both scope for reporting and redressal affected by access on caste, class and gender lines, the increasing incarcerations of Muslims, Dalits and Adivasi persons reveals a carceral trend marked by hierarchies and prejudices.[24] The prevailing gaps in the systems of records come alongside a growing reluctance towards questioning these gaps.

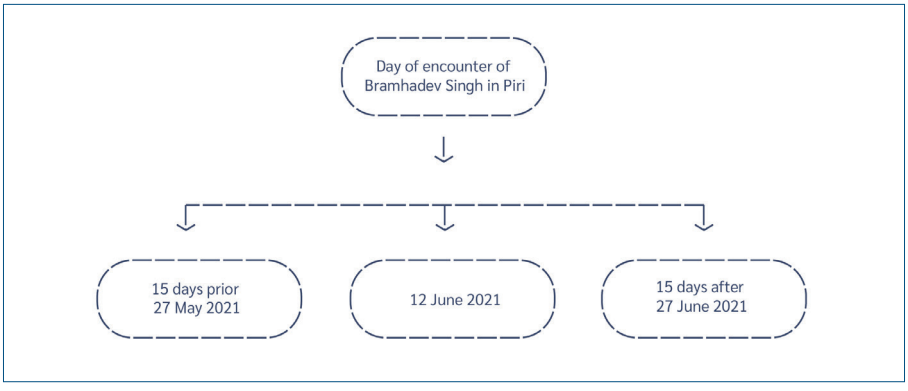
QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

Prabhat Khabar, founded in 1984 in Ranchi, is a leading paper and published daily in Jharkhand, Bihar and West Bengal. The newspaper is circulated in these states as well as in some parts of Odisha, and is known and generally respected for reporting social issues and revealing scams, such as the Fodder Scam.

Content analysis was carried out studying the Ranchi edition, for a period of 31 days—28 May 2021 to 27 June 2021. The period chosen began 15 days prior to the encounter killing of Bramhadev Singh on 12 June 2021. The quantitative space allotted to the news was very little.

Content analysis- Prabhat Khabar, Ranchi edition

Number of days analyses: 31 days / Total area analysed: 632832 cm^2



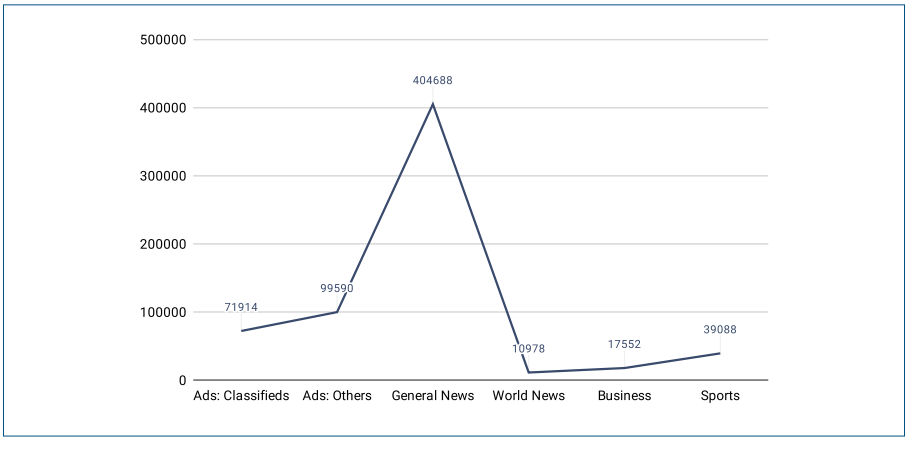


Chart 1: Distribution of Total Area in the Content Analysed (in cm²)

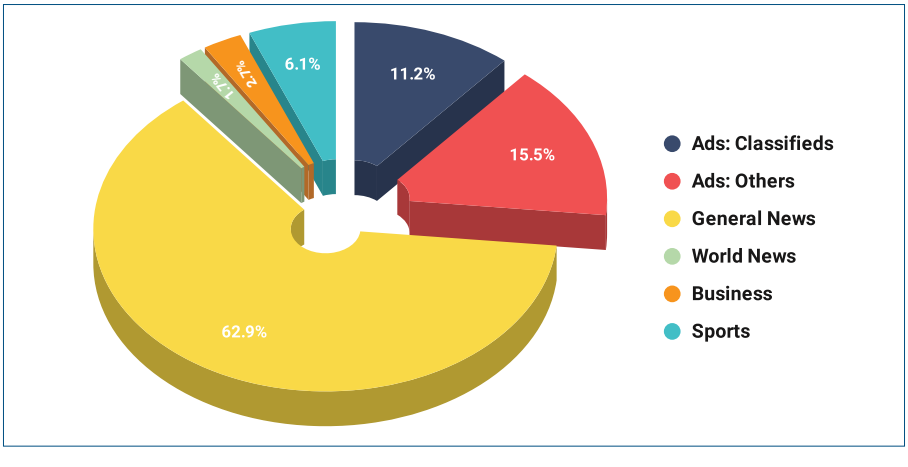


Chart 2: Distribution of total area analysed (in percentage)

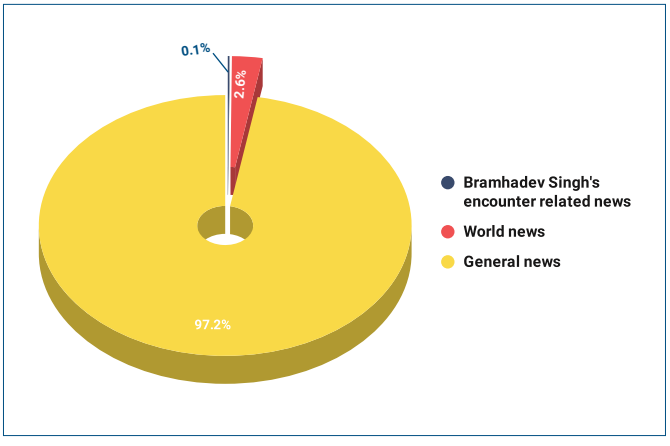


Chart 3: Distribution of Bramhadev Singh's encounter related news in the total news area

The coverage on news related to Bramhadev Singh's encounter was 607.5 cm, in the total area analysed.

Points of view represented

The coverage of the encounter comprises 0.095 percent of the total news area studied for the period in *Prabhat Khabar*. The initial online reporting of the news, even in *Prabhat Khabar*, termed the incident as an encounter, going with the version of the security agencies. Though this was rectified in the next day's news, with the Ranchi edition publishing the news on the front page, maximum space was still given to the police and authorities' viewpoints. Since the case still unfolded in the subsequent days, as newer details emerged, less space was given to the news. This ensured that these new facts were not published in the paper. Different voices represented in the newspaper were those of:

- The police
- Bramhadev's mother
- Bandhu Tirkey, MLA of Mandar and a member of the Jharkhand Vikas Morcha
- Jharkhand Janadhikar Manch
- It did not have any representation of the point of views of these figures or institutions:
- Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren, member of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha
- The Congress

- The BJP
- Bramhadev's wife, Jiramani Devi
- Other villagers and residents of Piri village
- Adivasi-rights organisations or other Adivasi leaders
- Home Ministry

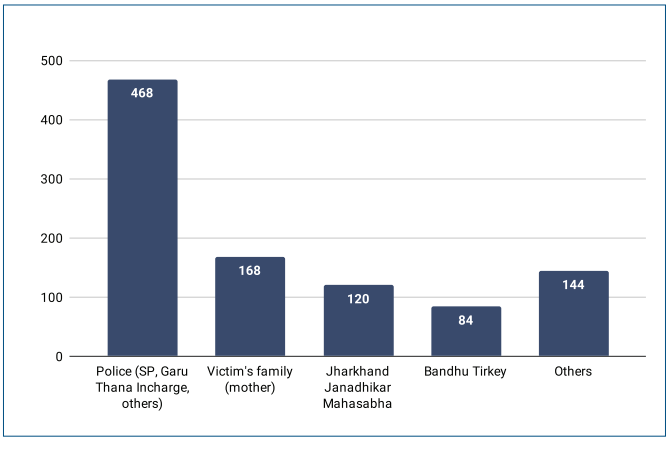


Chart 4: Points of view represented (in words)

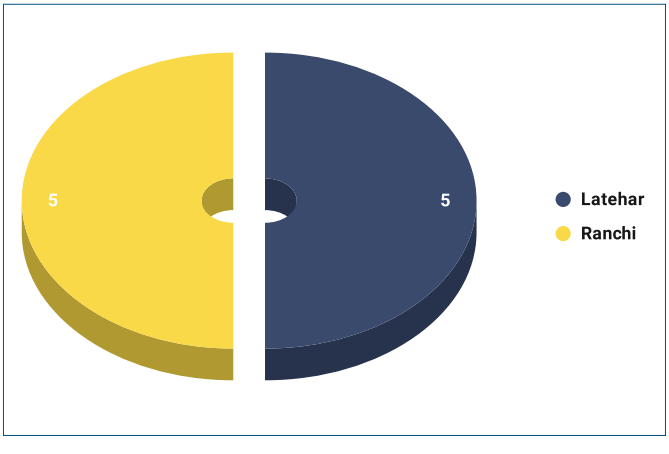


Chart 5: Dateline Chart

The dateline chart shows that, of the four reports published on the incident, two were filed from Latehar—the district in which the incident took place—and two from Ranchi, the capital city. This coverage, when compared with other English-language papers, was marginally better, presumably because the newspaper is published in Hindi, has a wider appeal among Hindi-language readers, and several editions of the paper are published across Jharkhand.

Since the quantitative coverage was very low, further deeper classi-

fications were carried out, in terms of the priority of the news in the paper during the period under study. This researcher also wanted to study how much coverage was given to COVID-19-related news, and whether coverage of the incident was compromised due to the ongoing pandemic.

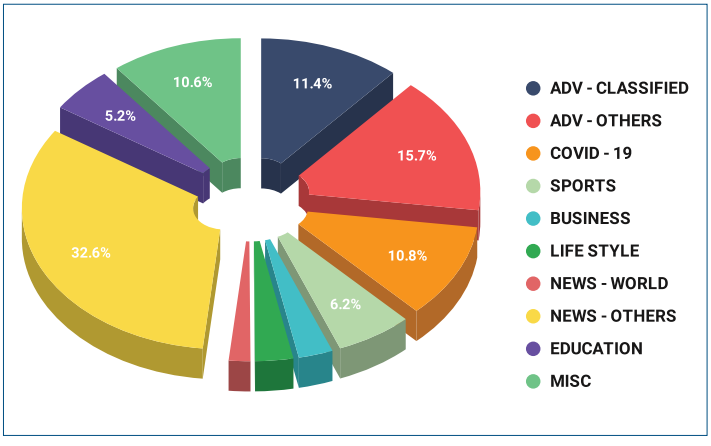


Chart 6: Newspaper's priorities in coverage during the studied period, further classifications

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

On 12 June 2021, several Hindi and English media outlets reported that an encounter had occurred between "Maoists" and the Jharkhand Police and security forces, in the Kuku-Piri Forest in Jharkhand's Latehar district. A rumour was spread that a Maoist, of the gang Chhotu Kerwar, had been killed. Local journalists reached the spot of the incident and started sharing videos and information that the one killed was not a Maoist but an Adivasi youth. In subsequent reporting by print and digital English and Hindi media outlets, it was clarified that the person killed was an Adivasi youth. The deceased was identified as Bramhadev Singh, who had gone out for hunting with five others, all from his family. Bramhadev, merely 24 years of age and a tempo driver, had been married for over a year to Jiramani Devi, and had a one-year-old son, Prince.

The incident took place during an unprecedented health crisis that overwhelmed all aspects of life, the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time of the incident, states such as Jharkhand were completely in the grip of the second wave of the pandemic. This is reflected during the quantitative analysis. Hence, the coverage given to the incident has to be seen

in this context as well. Although it is difficult to compare this period to others, because of a lack of precedent in recent times of a health crisis of the same scale, it is hard to say whether, during other times, such an incident would have received more coverage quantitatively. But the qualitative coverage, in terms of the content published in the given space could also have been different, and more nuanced, if journalists or reporters had asked certain questions based on a legal and historical understanding of encounters, fake encounters or extrajudicial killings. The incident itself has been reconstructed with the help of fact findings, reports, FIRs and other documents.

Though there were few reports on the incident, it is interesting to note the patterns emerging in the reporting. The newspaper published four reports in all, during the entire course of the incident and in the days that followed—even when there were new developments, such as fact-finding by civil society; the family of the victim demanding justice and compensation and writing letters to authorities and the chief minister; and protests. There were no op-eds, analyses, features or letters to editors published about the incident. The reports published did not investigate or dig deeper into the incident itself and failed to expose the dubious nature of police claims.

The incident took place in Ganaikhand, a *toli*, or hamlet, in Piri village. There are six camps and pickets of police and paramilitary forces between Latehar and Piri. The place is about 35 kilometres from Latehar and 140 kms from Ranchi, in Jharkhand. The village of Piri, situated amid the Kuku-Piri forest, has no connectivity by road. To reach the Ganaikhand hamlet, one needs to cross many rivulets and streams.

The people of the village are dependent on forest produce and agriculture. The hunting of small game is common in the areas, and people regularly hunt for rabbits, pigs and so on, on special occasions. The place has also seen youth migration off late. The village comprises around a hundred families (according to the census of 2011) and there are between ten and five families in Ganaikhand itself. It is yet to be electrified, and has no mobile network either.

Sarhul, a festival for the new year among Adivasis in Jharkhand, was to be celebrated on 13 June in Piri village. According to a fact-finding report by the Jharkhand Janadhikar Mahasabha, on 12 June, around ten Adivasi men from the village gathered in front of Rajeshwar Singh's house, so that they could proceed for hunting.[25] [26] For hunting, commu-

nities there have used a country-made gun, a bhartua for many generations. The gun is filled with gunpowder and can be only fired once. Six people of a group of 11, came out first; these were Bramhadev Singh, Raghunath Singh (40 years), Rajeshwar Singh (52 years), Dinenath Singh (25 years), Sukuldev Singh (45 years) and Gobind Singh (35 years). Bramhadev and Dinenath went ahead, while the others were behind them. This is when the incident took place. The fact-finding report conducted by Jharkhand Janadhikar Manch described the incident in the following terms:

> *As the first group moved about 50 feet towards the forest, then Dinenath saw security force personnel at the edge of the forest. He took two steps back and asked his other friends to go back. The people who were behind him started running. At that moment, the security force started firing from the other side. Raghunath, Rajeshwar, Sukuldev and Gobind took cover near a Mahua tree. Bramhadev, Dinenath and all four raised their hands by placing the gun on the ground and shouted that they were common people, not a Maoist (party), and requested not to shoot. Bramhadev and Dinenath also raised their hands and shouted. Bramhadev removed his t-shirt and pants, raised his hands and pleaded. According to Dinenath, Bramhadev did this to prove that he was completely innocent. But the firing continued. According to the victims and villagers "the firing was continuous".*

As a result of the firing, Dinenath Singh was the first to be hit by the bullet in the hand, Bramhadev Singh was hit next and fell soon as he was shot. The report notes that the firing continued for half an hour and that Raghunath Singh, Rajeshwar Singh, Dinenath Singh, Sukuldev Singh and Gobind Singh fled and entered Rajeshwar Singh's house. As the firing stopped, Bramhadev's aunt reached the spot and was chased away by the security forces.

The report further notes a crucial point:

> *During this period, some villagers saw that the security force personnel came from the forest towards the village and lifted Bramhadev Singh, holding one leg and one hand, and carried him across the river. According to the villagers, Bramhadev was alive by then because his hands and feet were trembling. The*

> *security forces placed Bramhadev on the ground across the river and again shot him thrice. According to the villagers' accusations, the security forces changed his clothes after this. Bramhadev is seen wearing a pair of blue jeans and yellow tee-shirt in the photo of his body at the incident site (published in local newspapers).*

According to the victims and other villagers, between sixty and a hundred security forces were at the edge of the forest. They were dressed in black and army-prints. During the firing, upon hearing the sound of bullets, other villagers also came out of their houses and went near the field.

Rajeshwar Singh's wife, Panpatiya Devi, who is also Bramhadev Singh's aunt, and the victims said: *"golibari mein pura jagah dhuandhuan ho gaya tha"*—the entire area was filled with smoke because of the fired bullets. The villagers told the fact-finding team that when they went on the hunt, initially they did not see the security forces stationed at the edge of the forest and that they would not have left their houses if they had. This was contradictory to the police's version that claimed they had been given adequate warning.

The fact-finding report also details how intimidation by the security forces continued after the incident. Security forces surrounded Rajeshwar Singh's house, where the others were hiding out of fear. The security forces threatened they would burn down the house if people did not come out. After hesitating for a while, Panpatiya Devi asked the forces how they were expecting them to come out if they could not, in the first place, distinguish between Maoists and others. The villagers decided to show the forces their Aadhaar cards. The report notes:

> *Under pressure, all five undressed themselves and came out in their vest/ underwear. They were made to sit outside the house. The women were sent to the other side. The security forces were asking the five men about why they ran away. Then the men said shots were being fired upon them, in such a situation, what would they have done if not run away? They were also being asked where the Naxalites were, where the Naxalites were kept hidden. The security force asked the victims and other villagers several times whether Maoists come to the village or not.*

A few hours after the incident, the police came to the village, took Bramhadev's body to a primary school, despite opposition from the villagers, and also beat up his aunt. The five other victims were eventually taken to the Latehar police station and were made to sign on several papers. On 13 June, Bramhadev's body was returned after the post-mortem, with an instruction to burn it immediately. When the villagers did not do so, and demanded instead that the other five be released, the Latehar police finally released them. They returned very late in the night.

After this, apparently the police gave Bramhadev's family Rs 30,000 in cash and promised a job. The police even told them that they made a "mistake." The villagers believe that they were made to take off their clothes as more killings were expected and a fabricated story constructed. (In some cases of fake encounters in these areas, it has been reported that the police changes the dress of the civilian and makes them wear a uniform or outfit of a banned organisation in order to show they are Maoists.) They said, "This means that they were also planning to kill us and fabricate a story, if the people of the village had not protested." Had they not protested, they too would have met with a similar fate.

On 13 June 2021, a police sub-inspector, Dibakar Dhobi, wrote a letter with a subject line "Regarding registering an FIR" to the Garu police station. In this, he described the incident, and said that the police had received the information about the presence of members of around fifteen banned *ugravadi*—terrorist forces—including CPI (Maoist)'s Chhotu Kerwar, Balram, Neeraj and others, who were laced with firearms and planning to carry out a *badi ghatna*, or major incident. The letter added that two groups had been constituted to verify the veracity of the information and "take necessary action."

On the night of 12 June, at 2.30 am in the morning, one of the groups of which Dhobi was a part, and with others, including the sub-inspector of Latehar police station, Ruplal Prasad, the DSP Arvind Kumar and others, proceeded to conduct a raid and search operations. In the morning, at around 8 am, when they were moving towards Ganaikhand's Barwatongri, they saw ten or twelve people who were armed. It further added "the armed men were cautioned by the police party to remove their arms and surrender. Again, in a louder voice, the armed men were told to surrender as we were from the police party." However, the letter said that "instead of surrendering, the armed men started firing upon

the police party." Given this situation, "the police party fired in retaliation and in self defense." After this, the letter mentions that the armed persons started running towards the village. Thereafter, it says, "the police party carefully surrounded (gherabandi) and attempted to catch the armed men." The letter then notes that, during the course of search operations by the Jaguar team, five persons carrying arms near the *nallah*, or canal, were caught, while others were able to run away taking advantage of the forest, bushes and nallah.[28]

The letter was received and signed by the Garu police station. Soon after, an FIR was registered against the five villagers, Bramhadev included, under various IPC sections—including Sections 353 and 307 for "assault or criminal force to deter public servant from discharge of his duty" and "attempt to murder." Sections of the Arms Act were also included in the FIR.

In one of the earliest reports published on 13 June 2021, *Prabhat Khabar* published the news of the incident on the front page of the report with the headline *"Naxali samajh police ne grameno par kar di firing, ek ki mauth."*—Mistaking villagers for Naxalites, police fired at them, one died.

This headline makes a slight departure from the regular headlines of reports on encounter killings, and also from how other media, especially mainstream or English-language media reported the incident.[29] Previous reporting on the incident often saw the blurring of distinctions between calling an incident an encounter just at the outset, on the basis of information from the police or other such sources. Instead of calling the villagers Maoists, the report made it clear in the headline that the death was that of a villager, not a Maoist. Although this still begs the question whether, had the person been a Maoist, such treatment would be seen as necessary, and also whether the police did not have any other alternatives, but this is the subject of a different discussion. Instead of calling villagers Maoists, as is often the case by the law enforcement, and the media which unquestioningly writes the police version, the report makes clear that there was a misunderstanding on the police's part.

The news mentions Bramhadev Singh's mother's point of view, but it stops at that. It does not ask any relevant questions after that; it could have asked why it was important for the police and the security forces to shoot fatally at all, for instance. Or which officers were responsible

for the killing, and what action did the government take against them, and so on. The news also placed the blame of the incident on the villagers: *"is beech Dakshin disha se search operation chalati aa rahi jharkhand jaguar ki team ne grameenon ko hathiyar ke sath dekh kar rukne ka ishara kiya, lekin grameen nahin ruke aur police unhen naxali samajh kar unki aur andhadhundh firing karne lage"*—since the villagers did not stop, the police had no other option but to shoot thinking they were Naxals.

The news report, then, places the burden of not being shot at on the victims and the deceased. The article in *Prabhat Khabar*, as also in other newspapers, shows how the police and security forces were helpless. Even in this, they are inaccurate and vague. None of the reports mention how precisely villagers are supposed to have posed a threat to well-equipped, armed security forces and police, who clearly outnumbered the villagers on the hunt.

On 15 June, a small news report appears at the left-most bottom corner of the last page, with the headline *"Paanch grameeno par prathmiki CID charge ki anushansa"* (recommendation to charge case against five villagers). Besides being a very generic headline, the placement of the news item ensured hardly anyone would read this. Moreover, the report clearly read as a one-sided one, informing that an FIR had been registered against five persons from the village and that Latehar SP had asked for a CID enquiry into the incident. This report mentioned the word *golibari*, or firing, and it said that it was a violation of the law on the part of the villagers to keep arms and go on hunting in the Palamu Tiger Reserve area. Moreover, this report also claimed that the villagers had received compensation, which was contradictory to the version narrated by the family members and villagers in the fact-finding report and during protests. The report also mentioned that the CID's takeover was part of the guidelines issued by the NHRC and the court.

Not only does the report not question the dubious claims regarding the compensation, the act of killing an innocent person and offering them compensation is not appraised or critically reported, normalising the idea that responsibility or accountability can be abdicated by those in power via the payment of meagre sums of money. In a sense, this monetises the very act of killing. The rewards associated with such killings for the police and armed personnel is also well-documented.

Meanwhile, the irony that villagers were arrested after one of their

own was killed, on a festive day, was lost in the media's reporting of the incident. Despite the newspaper being published from Jharkhand, fewer attempts were made by regional and local language newspapers to convey an understanding of Adivasi culture, and there is a starkly visible marginalisation of the community and the issues it faces. Instead, the media regularly has laudatory headlines applauding such encounter killings. For instance, could more attempts have been made to understand a festival such as Sarhul, in which country-made fire arms are used for hunting? The fact that the firearm in question was the *bhartua* gun, used for hunting, was not clarified in the reports. This is a locally made gun. It is filled with gunpowder before firing and only a single shot can be fired. It is used to hunt small animals and to scare animals to save the crop. This gun has been in use for many generations. Alternatively, according to the logic that the security and police forces provided for justifying such killings, wouldn't fire crackers used during festivals such as Diwali also be considered dangerous? Further, the lack of development from the people's perspective is seldom reported in these news stories. The development issue is so stark that even a mainstream print newspaper cannot help but highlight that there is no road to reach the hamlet.

The English newspapers also did not help; the 12 June edition of the *New Indian Express* ran the headline "Maoist gunned down by security forces in Jharkhand." *The Pioneer*, an online news site said on 13 June, "Youth, mistaken as Maoist, killed in retaliatory firing by security forces," indicating that there was a firing exchange of equal measure and that the forces had fired only in retaliation.

Another report, titled *"Piri muthbhed: paanch yuvko ko hirasat mein lekar police kar rahi hai poochhtaachh"* (Piri encounter: Police are interrogating five youths in custody), was published by *Hindustan*, a local daily. It read unbelievably sympathetic to the police's version of the incident, stating, for instance that "even though the police is not considering the [killed] youth a naxal, the arms obtained from them became a trouble for them." It said that even if the youths were going hunting, they did not have local arms. Further, it said that "even though the police is sympathetic, it was because the people kept the arms that the situation got complicated." Such reporting is not only insensitive and biased but also, in journalistic terms, does not even do the bare minimum it could have, by quoting family members or attempting to understand the oth-

er side of things. The alleged killer is humanised, while the one killed is stripped of dignity, even in death. The pinnacle of biased reporting can be understood from statements such as *"is ghanghor jangal mein achanak hathiyar ke saath logon ka samna hona aur dono taraf se in counter ke bad grameen ki maut ko vah ittefak man rahe hain."* The use of the word "ittefak"—coincidence—is particularly disturbing.

None of the several media reports analyse, mention or question the villagers' version, which stated Bramhadev Singh was still alive when he was hit at first, and that he was then taken to another place where the security forces fired three more rounds. The journalists showed no interest to bring to light such accounts of the eye witnesses. Content analysis of *Prabhat Khabar* shows that multiple encounter incidents were covered with similar headlines, for instance in *Jharkhand Naxal News: Jharkhand ke Latehar ke jangal mein police naxali muthbhed, Ek ugrvadi dher, Hathiyar baramad, Sarch abhiyan chala rahi police, Jharkhand ke Khunti-Chaibasa border ke jungle mein muthbhed, 10 lakh ka inami PLFI sub-area commander dher*—A police-Naxal encounter in Jharkhand's Latehar forest, one militant killed, arms recovered, police conducting search operation, encounter in Jharkhand's Khunti-Chaibasa border forest, 10 lakh reward, PLFI sub-area commander killed. Almost all reports acted as public relations communications for the law enforcement.

Most reports do not contain quotes from villagers, family members and others, and appear to be a modified version of police press releases. Most of these articles also do not dig deeper, or seem to be asking questions about the necessity and relevance of such acts, when by law the police is supposed to arrest them, prepare the chargesheet after the investigation, and present them for trial, leaving it for the judiciary to decide. Here, the press often sides with the police plan to carry out extra judicial killings.

The pleas to register an FIR against the erring officers, who should ideally have been charged under various sections related to unlawful killing and atrocities—the law also asks to do so—have fallen on deaf ears. Just one small report in *Prabhat Khabar* mentions an MLA, Bandhu Tirkey, and his demand for a high-level inquiry. It is unclear whether the media outlets reached out to the chief minister, the ruling party or the opposition parties for quotes.

The People's Union of Civil Liberties, Jharkhand, a network of civil-society organisations, wrote to the state's DGP and the Chief Secretary, flagging the killing of Bramhadev Singh by security forces. It demanded that an FIR against perpetrators be immediately filed, that the false FIR be withdrawn and that an independent inquiry be initiated.

In October 2021, Jiramani Devi filed a complaint at the Latehar district judicial magistrate court. The court took up the case and decided to probe it at its own level instead of asking the local police station to lodge an FIR, according to a report published in *The Telegraph*.[30] Civil-society organisations expressed dismay at the fact that, despite having a government that came into power under the pretext of land and identity conflicts, the state has failed to take up the matter or show any willingness to address it.[31] This too was not covered in any of the news reports.

A comparison of the treatment given to this particular incident with some earlier instances points to the fact that not much has changed when it comes to the reporting of encounter cases involving people from a distinctly marginalised background. In a 2007 article published in journal *Economic and Political Weekly*, N Venugopal wrote about a specific extrajudicial killing:

> *It is another strange aspect that out of the thousands of encounters, not even in a couple, the police officers were injured demonstrating the extreme and incredible efficiency of police in always killing their opponents and without even getting bruised once. If one analyses the FIR quoted above, the opponents were more in number, almost double, than the police, and apparently with equal fire power. Even then there were seven casualties on one side and not even a scratch on the other!*

Legally, in India, police authorities are authorised for law enforcement and crime investigation, not for exacting punishment. In fact, keeping suspects in custody for more than 24 hours is also not allowed, even for investigation. Further, the police does not have the right to snuff out the life of a person who may be under their custody or may have come into contact with arms. Venugopal clarifies that legal sanction for killing someone confirmed, beyond doubt, to be a criminal, is allowed only in accordance with the "procedure established by law," as

per Article 21 of the Constitution of India, and that too in "the rarest of rare cases," as per a Supreme Court verdict in 1983.

Law-enforcement agencies are permitted to use reasonable and minimum force to disperse a mob or unlawful assembly, but even in such a case they need to take permission from a magistrate to open fire and they should not aim at people to kill. Venugopal notes:

> *Sections 100 and 300 of the Indian Penal Code allow self-defence to ordinary citizens as well as police personnel but the need to self-defence has to be substantiated and proved in a court of law, with the burden of proof lying on the defender. In any case, first of all, all killers, including police personnel, have to undergo legal proceedings, and they have to prove that the killing happened in self-defence only. Even as the theoretical legal position states so, in practice, police officers in India have been sanctioned impunity. They can kill and condone themselves by claiming self-defence and not registering any complaint.*

In September 2014, in *PUCL vs State Of Maharashtra & Ors*, the Court observed:

> *Whenever a specific complaint is made against the police alleging commission of a criminal act on their part, which makes out a cognizable case of culpable homicide, an FIR to this effect must be registered under appropriate sections of the I.P.C. Such case shall be investigated by State CBCID or any other specialized investigation agency.* [32]

A magisterial enquiry must be held in all instances where a death occurs in the course of police action, as expeditiously as possible, preferably within three months. In conducting this enquiry, it is a must to speak to relatives of the deceased, eye witnesses who have information of the circumstances leading to the encounter, police station records and so on. That none of the media reports go deeper into investigating such enquiries is telling.

In a study entitled "Trends in first page priorities of Indian print media reporting - A content analysis of four English Language newspapers," published in 2010, the authors highlighted the changing priorities of traditional newspapers. It said:

The analysis, which involves the first page news coverage (including headlines, type of content, photos and advertisements), offered an insight into the departures from the traditional news values. The study has witnessed a growing trend for first reporting and investigative reporting, treating news as a commercialized commodity for mass consumption, filled with crime, legal disputes, politics, etc. with economic, social and development news taking a backseat. The pages of the newspapers are filled with increased use of large and small color photos (especially photos of the main players in each story), and the use of long titles and large fonts for even short reports to make up the space of the first page look compact, suggesting a crisis for news due to intense competition and acquiring contours of magazine journalism/tabloidization. These findings read with the characteristics of market driven journalism, originally emanated from the US in 1990s, suggest an increasing tabloidization and trivialization of news.

Similarly, *Prabhat Khabar* was filled with news reports on COVID-19, petty crimes and the government's achievements; there was very little space for news on other aspects of politics, environment and society. The content seemed very crude, and it read as if it was almost filling the space rather than investigating incidents. This raises larger questions: for instance, how is news perceived today, and how is it different from, say, what its function was when the print paper was launched. Was there a different kind of space provided to civil and human-rights violations earlier? Did the print newspaper also originate from movements?

Jyoti Belur notes:

Reiner (2003) suggests that although the media highlight scandals and controversies about the police and policing, they propagate the idea that policing solutions are the only conceivable ones for the crime and disorder problem.

This was true of *Prabhat Khabar*. There was persistent coverage in some cases when the news was sensational—involving corruptions and scandals, for instance. But in the cases involving encounters and Adivasis, similar critical reporting was missing. Belur's insights are particularly useful in understanding this phenomenon:

this research revealed that while eight officers interviewed felt

that the media unconditionally approved of encounters, a majority of others (30 of the 38 interviewed) felt that media reporting displayed a mixed attitude – approval if the encounter was perceived to be 'genuine' and criticism if the dead person was not a 'hardcore' criminal. While a number of officers maintained that the press was neither prejudiced nor biased either against or towards the police and reported facts as they saw them, there was a subtext, which implied that the media reported events only to sensationalize, not as responsible reporting, but as commercialized packaging of news.

CONCLUSION

The history of such incidents in Jharkhand is also indicative of the fact that the press and media generally approve of encounters, making themselves like an arm of the law enforcement. The details of the incident came out through the fact finding carried out by the civil liberties activists independently, as opposed to the journalists bringing them to light as part of their job. The media has an impact on perpetuating the myth of what Reiner calls "police fetishism"—the idea that the police is indispensable, in the absence of meaningful public discourse on alternate social and cultural changes as solutions to crime. Other analyses of this phenomenon are also useful, as Belur points out, G Cavendish noted that the hyperbolic depiction of crime and criminals in the media has allowed for particular sanctions to become acceptable policy and part of the public agenda. Another theory put forward by J Callanan suggests that the crime situation is often distorted when portrayed by the media, which tends to promulgate simplistic ideological divides, such as equating the police with good and the criminal with evil. This, as Belur writes, is what garners support for simplistic solutions such as executing or incapacitating the criminal. Therefore, based on the quantitative and qualitative analysis, a conclusion can be drawn that the idea of inclusiveness of the versions of Adivasi people, who are marginalised, often illiterate, and not in possession of social and political capital, does not strike the media when it sides with the law enforcement, gives the latter many times more print space than the victims, and hardly chooses to question the paradigm of extra judicial killings.

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EENADU'S COVERAGE OF TWO SEX CRIMES IN TELANGANA IN NOVEMBER 2019

/JAHNAVI UPPULETI

ABSTRACT

This case study analyses coverage, in Eenadu*—the largest-selling Telugu newspaper—of two sex crimes that occurred in the state of Telangana in November 2019. The gang rape and murder of Disha (anonymised), a 26-year-old veterinarian in Hyderabad on 27 November 2019, shook the entire state and sparked outrage across the country.[1] On the other hand, the gang rape and murder of Samatha[2] (anonymised), a 30-year-old Scheduled Caste woman in the village of Yellapatar, in Asifabad-Komarambheem district in the same state, on 24 November 2019—only three days before the incident involving Disha took place—barely made it to news platforms. This study attempts to understand the reportage through quantitative and qualitative research methods.*

Eenadu*'s coverage on these two crimes varied drastically. While the reportage sensationalised Disha's case, it also demanded justice and questioned the police and the government, and sought out many points of view, including those of politicians, film fraternities, human-rights organisations*

and others. Her case was also reported extensively from the day after her body was found. On the other hand, it took ten days for Eenadu *to start following up on the incident relating to Samatha regularly, after incessant pressure from activists. Furthermore, the reportage on her case was limited and very simplistic—articles related to her in Phase 1 and 2 comprised viewpoints of her family or activists discussing the issue of discrimination against, or insufficient attention to, Dalit women in media. All the follow-up articles that relate to Samatha focus on the accused and the punishment process. The disparity is evident, and this could be because Samatha's incident did not change the priority of the paper's news coverage, whereas, following Disha's case, sexual crimes became the most reported news. In total, in* Eenadu, *there were 25 front page articles when the victim was from the upper caste background while there was just one article in the same space when the victim was from the marginalised community. The study argues, therefore, that the lack of concern and empathy for women from marginalised communities is clearly evident from a distinct lack of reporting and extensive discussion by the highest circulated dailies such as* Eenadu.

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CASE STUDY

According to data provided by the National Crime Records Bureau, 32,033 rape cases were filed in 2019 across India.[3] Out of these, 3,486 were crimes against Scheduled Caste women and were filed under the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.[4] While the atrocities against upper-caste women are likely to be reported by the media and provoke public outrage, the rape cases involving SC women survivors are rarely covered extensively and do not engender the same kind of outcry. A 2020 submission to the UN Special Rapporteur for Violence Against Women by fifteen organisations, including the All India Dalit Mahila Adhikar Manch, underscores this contrast.[5]

Indian newsrooms are largely dominated by upper castes. According to a recent Oxfam India and Newslaundry report, upper castes occupy around 90 percent of positions of leadership in media organisations.[6] This results in the lack of detailed reportage of atrocities against Dalits, and a lack of the required sensitivity when reporting, to avoid sensationalising violence against Dalits.[7] Several factors besides newsworthiness, such as relatability, class and locale, also play a role in the nature of reporting.[8] The consistent outrage articulated by the media over the crime against Disha, a woman from the landed and influential upper caste Reddy community, was followed by outpourings of sympathy among many, while Samatha's coverage was minimal in comparison and she was depicted as one of many Dalit women to face such a crime, rather than as an individual.

METHODOLOGY

This researcher analysed 30 days of *Eenadu*'s coverage, from 20 November 2019 to 20 December 2019. Dates were divided into three phases—20 to 27 November, seven days before the incident involving Disha; 28 November to 6 December, the dates between the incident and the extrajudicial killings of the accused in Disha's case; and 7 November to 20 December, the dates after the killings.

Eenadu is the largest-selling Telugu newspaper and is mainly sold in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. It consists of 14 pages (excluding the

district paper), and this researcher has analysed all the news articles, opinions and editorials, while leaving out the sports, lifestyle, real-estate and health pages in every edition.

Caste favouritism by media outlets, mainly in the Telugu news outlets, has been a long practice. In its coverage of politics in the Telugu states, *Eenadu* has shown consistent support towards the Kamma community. While that favouritism has nothing to do with reporting sexual crimes, this study attempts to understand the differences between these two cases that occurred in the same week, in the nature of the reporting and reactions by media platforms.

Phase 1 : 20 to 27 November: Seven days prior to Disha's rape; the week in which Samatha's rape occurred, on 24 November

Samatha, who was gang-raped on 24 November, 2019 and later killed, was a 30-year-old Scheduled Caste woman who belonged to the Budagajangam community. She sold utensils and balloons for a living. Her mutilated body was found on the outskirts of Yellapatar, on 25 November, and her throat had been slit.

Analysing *Eenadu*'s coverage from 20 November gives an insight into the stories being covered at the time, the frequency of the coverage of sexual crimes before the incident involving Disha, and most importantly, whether the reportage on sexual crimes changed or showed any signs of outrage after Samatha, whose rape and murder took place on 24 November.

Minimal reportage on sexual crimes was carried out by the paper between 20 and 27 November. There was no major surge in reportage following 25 November, after Samatha's body had been found. Seven articles on sexual crimes were published between these dates, out of which four were published between 20 and 24 November, and three from 25 to 27 November. Furthermore, none of these made it to the front page.

The first report on Samatha was printed on 26 November, on the fourteenth page of the paper. The second was on 27 Novemeber: this was a follow-up on her case, noting her family's grievances, and it was published on the eleventh page.

Out of the seven reports published during this period, 28.5 percent

were related to Samatha.

	Articles published on sexual crimes	Articles before Samatha	Articles after Samatha
Number of articles	7	4	3

Table 1: Number of articles on sexual crimes before and after the incident involving Samatha

The road transport corporations' protests and ongoings in Maharashtra politics were most extensively covered during these dates. None of the sexual-crime reports carried the point of view of politicians, prominent personalities, celebrities or the families of the accused. Although Samatha's incident happened in Telangana, it did not alter the rate of coverage of other ongoing issues during these dates.

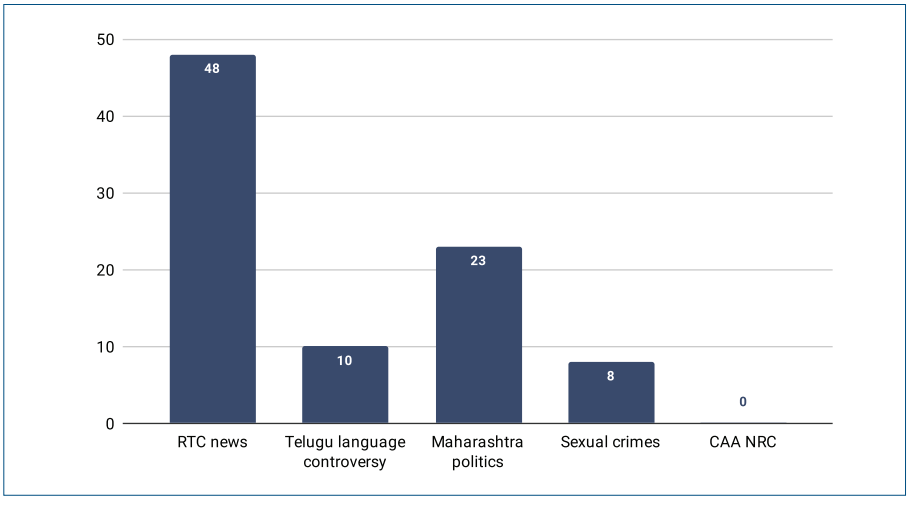


Chart 1: Frequently reported news in Eenadu between 20 and 27 November 2019

Phase 2: 28 November to 6 December
Dates between Disha's incident and the extrajudicial killings of the accused

Disha (anonymised) was gang-raped and torched to death on 27 November. The first report of the incident in *Eenadu* was published on 29 November, a day after the police found her body. Articles on sex-

ual crimes increased following this incident, and these covered other instances of sexual offences as well, while the reportage on Samatha remained minimal. No articles on sexual offences were published on the front page before Phase 1; in sharp contrast, after the incident involving Disha, 21 articles related to sexual crimes were published on the front page in Phase 2. Of these, 13 articles were about Disha, and one article related to Samatha were published on the front pages.

	Total articles related to sexual crimes	Articles related to Disha	Articles related to Samatha	Articles on other sexual crimes/ opinions on sexual crimes
No. of articles	129	58	3	68

Table 2: Number of articles related to sexual crimes in Eenadu between 28 November and 6 December 2019

Not only was there extensive coverage of Disha's incident but many points of view were also sought, during the reporting, of politicians, members of the film fraternity, human-rights organisations, her family and the families of the accused.

	POV of rights activists	POV of politicians & celebrities	POV of victim's family	POV of the families of the accused	POV of police	POV of protestors
Number of articles related to Disha	2	22	3	1	1	7
Number of articles related to Samatha	1	0	1	0	0	1

Table 3: The POVs of different groups of people published in Eenadu between 28 November and 6 December 2019

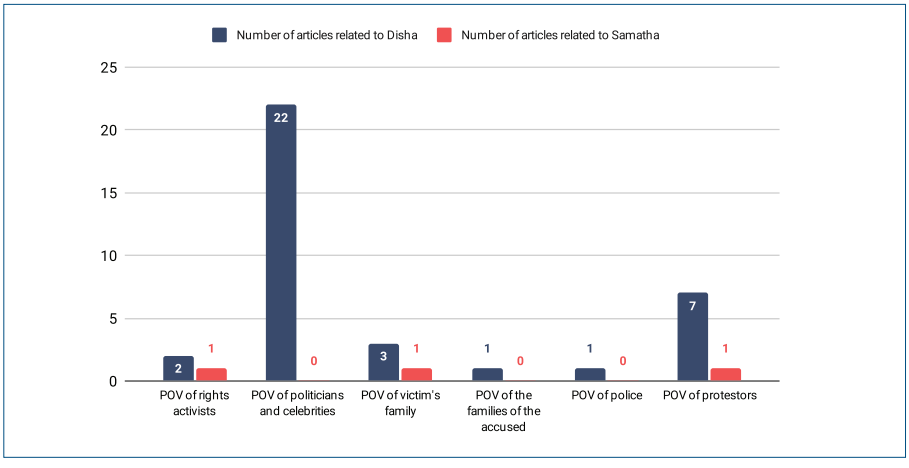


Chart 2: Articles in Eenadu with POV of various groups of people about the incidents

Out of the 128 articles published in this period that were related to sexual offences, 45.3 percent of the reportage was related to Disha and only 2.34 percent was related to Samatha. The number of discussions regarding sexual offences increased in the paper's editorials and feature columns. Many articles were published on the need for security, safety precautions and the dysfunctional security systems. Articles proposing—or opining about—a change of laws were also published. While some articles were blaming the police, others drew descriptions of the accused and remarked on their personalities. Politicians from opposition parties demanded the chief minister's response and immediate action, while articles that covered the point of view of the ruling government comforted Disha's family and reassured them that justice would be meted out.

It is noticeable that while Disha's incident engendered well-rounded reportage, including the POVs of several people and organisations, the three articles reported during this period relating to Samatha included one about the neglect of Dalit women's issues by Dalit activists; a reported piece on the arrest of the accused in her case; and a piece about protests near Yellapatar by her family and Dalit-rights organisations.

	Articles about security	Articles discussing a change of laws	Articles blaming the police	Articles about the accused
Number of articles related to Disha	10	3	2	5
Number of articles related to Samatha	0	0	0	0

Table 4: Articles covering different angles in Eenadu related to sexual crimes between 28 November and 6 December 2019

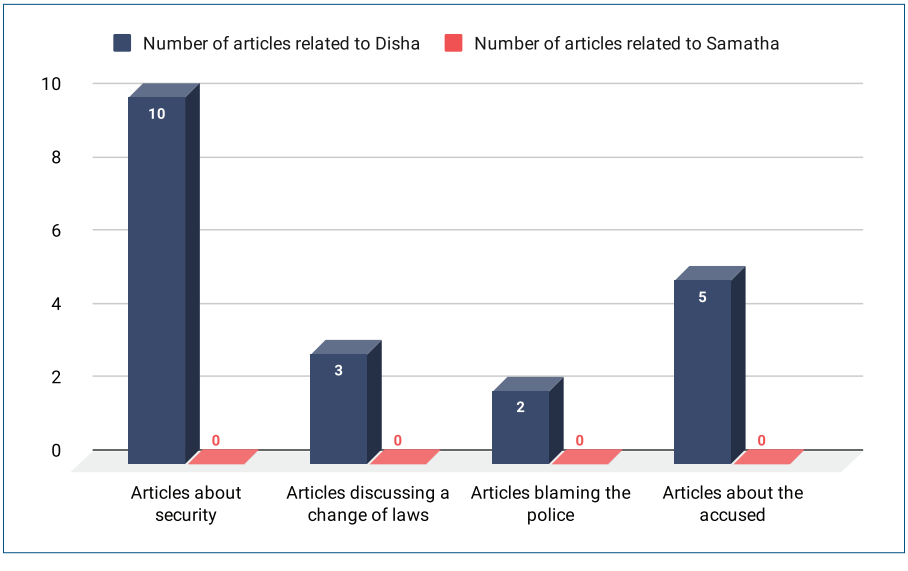


Chart 3: Articles covering different angles in Eenadu related to sexual crimes between 28 November and 6 December 2019

In Phase 1, news related to RTC protests were reported the most; after 27 November, news related to sexual crimes dominated.

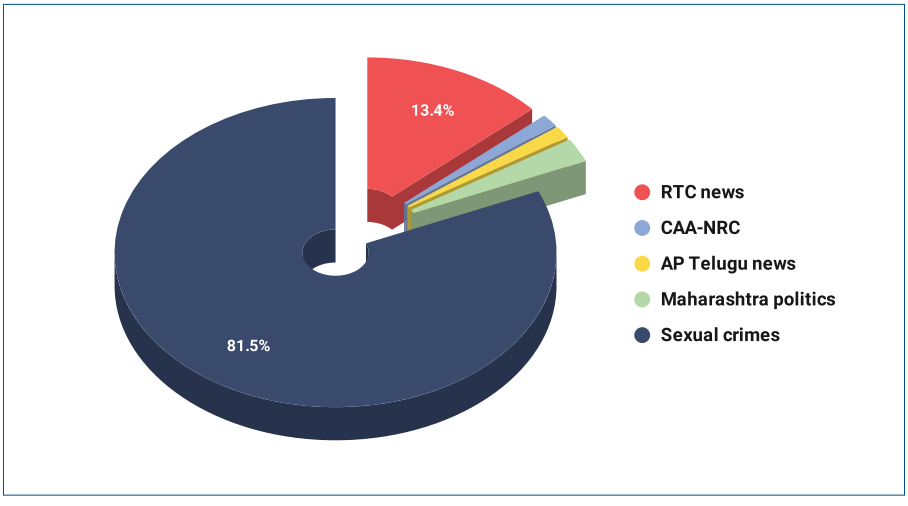


Chart 4: Frequently reported news in Eenadu between 28 November - 6 December 2019

A total of 12 pieces—opinions, features and editorials—were published about sexual offences during these dates. The rise in these articles, along with a drastic increase in reportage on other sexual crimes, could suggest to readers that Disha's incident had inspired other sex offenders.

Phase 3: 7 December to 20 December

The period after the extrajudicial killings of the accused in Disha's case

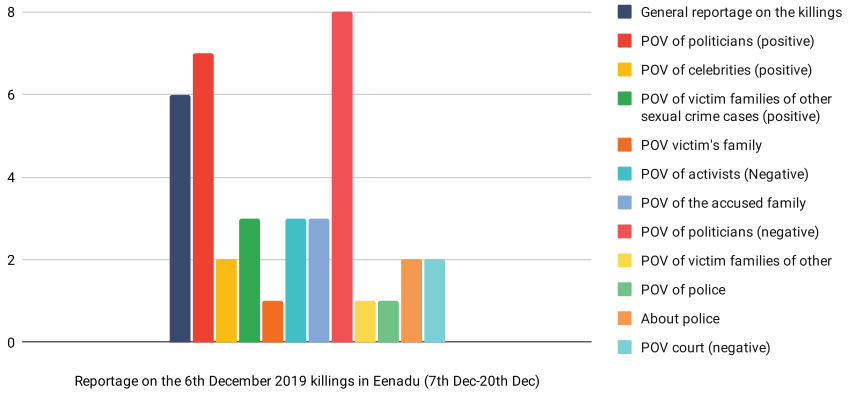
The four accused in Disha's gang rape and murder were killed in police firing on the morning of 6 December.[9] The police claimed that they were forced to retaliate after the accused had started attacking the police with stones and sticks; they further claimed that the accused had snatched the police's guns and started firing.

The killings were followed by praise and celebrations over what many considered to be the police's victory, but there was also vocal opposition from human-rights activists and thinkers to the extra judicial killings. *Eenadu*'s reportage shifted from the nature of its earlier discussions on sexual crimes to reportage on the police. The report on 7 December was on the front page carried the headline "Justice served." *Eenadu*, like many other news platforms, began by glorifying the extrajudicial killings after blaming the negligence of police in Phase 2.

The developments in Samatha's case were reported comparatively

more in Phase 3 than in the previous two phases. Reportage related to sexual crimes also increased compared to Phases 1 and 2. Most of the reportage on sexual crimes focussed on the death penalty and the need for justice and punishment. Articles related to Disha focussed primarily on the killings and developments arising from the post-mortem of her body.

Chart 5: Reportage on the 6th December 2019 killings in Eenadu (7 Dec-20 Dec)



Reportage on the 6th December 2019 killings in Eenadu (7th Dec-20th Dec)

A total of 135 articles related to sexual crimes were published in Phase 3, out of which 19 made it to the front pages. Fifty-five articles were related to Disha's case, and 12 were published on the front page. Eighteen articles were published that related to Samatha's case, and for the first time, one article was published on the front page. In total, on Disha, there were 25 front page articles in *Eenadu* while on Samatha, there was just one.

Out of the 138 articles regarding sexual offences that were published in the third phase, 40.7 percent were articles related to Disha's case and 13.3 percent were related to Samatha's case. The constant media spectacle carried out over Disha's case enraged Samatha's family and Dalit activists pushed for justice for Samatha.[10] The articles related to Samatha in Phase 1 and 2 comprised viewpoints of her family or activists discussing the issue of discrimination against—or insufficient attention to—SC women in media.

The total number of articles on Samatha in Phase 1 and 2 is 6. It

took ten days for *Eenadu* to start following up on Samatha's incident regularly, after incessant pressure from activists. On the other hand, Disha's incident was reported extensively from the very day after her body was found. In Phase 2, which is the eight-day period between Disha's rape and murder and the killings of the accused in her case, 58 articles related to her case were published.

All the follow-up articles related to Samatha focus on the accused and the punishment process. Only one article between these dates (from Phase 3) is from the point of view of a family of the accused and the rest summarise general developments, such as renaming her from the Asifabad rape victim to "Samatha," or describing the appointment of the fasttrack court and demands from Dalit organisations. As mentioned, activists had to fight for Samatha's rape and murder to get any attention from the media and public.

In contrast, Disha's coverage was well-rounded, containing different POVs and a good deal of empathy from several figures. During Phase 2, the paper published articles quoting politicians (from both the opposition and ruling parties) who were extending solidarity to Disha's family. There was no report of an offering of solidarity from political parties for Samatha in any of the phases. The killings of the accused ignited demands for punishment for rapists in general during Phase 3. The reportage in this period covered the demands of several families of rape victims and survivors across the country, such as the Unnao rape case where a 17-year-old girl was gang-raped in 2017 in Uttar Pradesh, for which a BJP legislator was convicted for rape in 2019.

Articles concerning sexual offences continued to dominate the reportage, followed by coverage of the CAA-NRC issue.

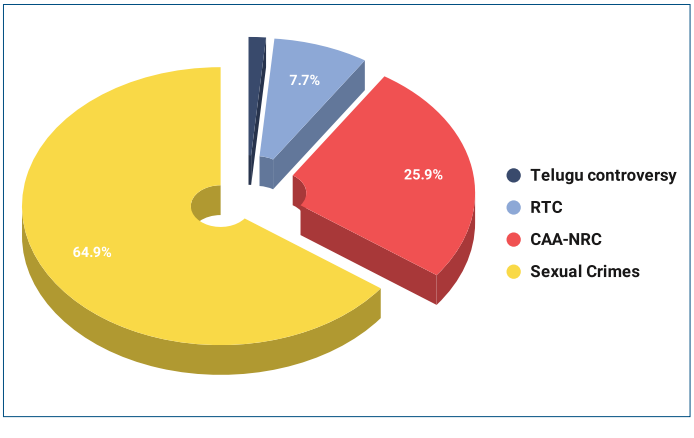


Chart 6: Frequently reported news in Eenadu between 6 and 20 December 2019

CONCLUSION

Eenadu's coverage on these two crimes varied drastically. While the reportage sensationalised Disha's case, it demanded justice and questioned the police and the government. Reporting about Samatha, till the end, was limited and very simplistic. Disha's coverage was frequently found on the front pages of *Eenadu*, but Samatha's case made it to the front page only once. The first report regarding Samatha was published on the fourteenth page and on the other hand Disha's first report was on the front page.

The disparity is evident, and one of the most obvious reasons to conclude this is because the incident involving Samatha did not change the priority of the paper's news coverage. Following Disha's case, sexual crimes became the most reported news. The lack of concern, spectacle and empathy for women from marginalised communities, such as Samatha, is clearly evident from this distinct lack of follow-up reporting and extensive discussion by the highest circulated dailies, such as *Eenadu*.

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HOW DINA MALAR COVERED THE STERLITE KILLINGS

/ Ramani Mohanakrishnan

ABSTRACT

This case study analyses media coverage of an incident that occurred in the Thoothukudi district of Tamil Nadu in 2018, in which police forces opened fire against civlians protesting the expansion of a copper-smelter plant, Sterlite Copper, owned by the multinational corporation, Vedanta Limited. The protestors, mostly the poor fishermen and the general public living in the port town of Thoothukudi, opposed the contamination of water, soil and air caused by the plant. During the 100 days of the non-violent protest, many individuals from marginalised communities, including Dalits and transgender persons, played a key role in leading the protest, and evidence points to the casteist nature of police brutality as well. The study uses quantitative and qualitative content-analysis techniques, focussing on coverage in the Chennai edition of Tamil daily Dina Malar *from 7 May to 6 June 2018 of the protest against the plant, the police crackdown against protesters that led to the killing of at least 14 people and the events that followed. The quantitative analysis examines how the news relating to the massacre was distributed and the categories it fell under, the space giv-*

en to different viewpoints, and so on, while the qualitative analysis attempts to study how the incident was covered in a wider thematic sense.

Among the case study's observations are that the massacre had prominence in Dina Malar *to an extent, although it had not covered the protest before the violence; that many of the reports were in the format of "hearsay," that much of the coverage was not done on the ground in Thoothukudi; that a significant amount of the coverage—37 percent—framed it as a "law and order" issue and not as the livelihood issue of the poor fishermen and the general public living in the area, while 19 percent directly compared the protestors to Naxals, Maoists, separatists, terrorists or miscreants; and that none of the coverage carried any condemnation of the killings apart from reports referring to statements and press releases by political leaders. Finally, the language that the newspaper used echoed the narrative of the state, and its police machinery, making it appear as though the protest warranted extreme measures such as gunfire from the police.*

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CASE STUDY

Sterlite Copper is a copper-smelting factory and a subsidiary owned by Vedanta Limited, one of the many subsidiaries of Vedanta Resources.[1] Vedanta Resources is one of the world's leading oil and gas metals companies.[2] Its major mining plants are located in India, South Africa, Namibia, Zambia and Australia,[3] and its headquarters is in London, United Kingdom.[4] One of Vedanta's copper-smelting factories is located in the Thoothukudi district of Tamil Nadu, on the Coromandel Coast of the Bay of Bengal. Thoothukudi is traditionally known as the "Pearl City," on account of the prevailing Pearl fish in the area, which is a testament to the marine diversity and richness of the area.

The Thoothukudi plant is one of India's largest copper-smelting plants.[5] Since its establishment, there have been several instances of official reports against Sterlite Copper for violating waste management and other protocols.[6] Studies carried out by several non-profit organisations and experts from time to time have linked the plant to respiratory disease, land and groundwater pollution, and other dangers to human and animal life.[7] Several fishermen's groups in the area have been resisting the plant since 1994, since they feared that waste from the plant would destroy the environment—particularly its marine diversity—which their livelihoods depended on.[8] Growing wider and larger over the years, the sporadic protests gained support all over the state in May 2018. They met with state brutality subsequently: 14 persons were killed, including a 17-year-old girl and over a hundred injured.[9] The brutal massacre shook the Indian union and received strong condemnation worldwide, including from United Nations human-rights experts.[10]

State violence against the protesters

In a comparative global report on state violence against protesting civilians in 2019, India stood second, after Myanmar, in unleashing state violence, with 1,183 recorded incidents of state violence and 1,028 of these occurring as a response to protests.[11] The use of violence by the state through police, paramilitary and military force against the protesters has been a growing concern in India over the last two decades.

Right before the COVID-19-induced lockdown, for instance, the

country saw the mobilisation of massive protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act, which was met with deadly force by the state.[12] At least 25 people were killed in the police violence during these protests.[13] In March 2007, 14 people from a fishing village, including two women, protesting potential land acquisition associated with the setting up of a chemical hub (leased to the Salim Group, an Indonesian company) were killed in police violence and gunfire in Nandigram.[14]

The use of extreme police force against civil protests is the trend across Indian states. In Tamil Nadu, several people have died at the hands of police violence unleashed in an attempt to quell protests, irrespective of the party in power. On 23 July 1999, labourers working in the Manjolai tea estate in Tirunelveli were lathi-charged by the police. At least 17 people who ran towards the Thamirabarani river to save themselves from the brutal attack died, and several were injured.[15] The ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), which at the time was in alliance with the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance, set up the Justice Mohan Commission to investigate the massacre, which concluded that 11 people died from drowning and six succumbed to injuries.[16]

In September 2012, an announcement by the authorities about the loading of uranium—the final step before nuclear reactors become functional—intensified what had been a year-long non-violent protest against the Koodankulam Nuclear Plant, organised by people from Idinthakarai and nearby villages.[17] One person was killed in police gunfire, and several were injured, on 10 September 2012. Another protestor succumbed to injuries on 13 September, when a coast guard aircraft flew very close, and the person fell on top of a rock out of fear.[18]

Just over a year before the Sterlite killings, over a hundred people were injured because of a police lathi-charge, on the seventh day of a peaceful protest for Jallikattu (also known as Pro-Jallikattu protests).[19]

Sterlite Killings

Over the years, the Sterlite factory has had several hazardous accidents, including gas leaks, which have killed 17 and injured several hundred people.[20] The Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board—TNPCB—closed the plant after a major sulphur dioxide gas leak in the year 2013. During the appeal, the Supreme Court ordered a hefty fine of Rs 100 crore, but allowed the plant to function, citing "economic" reasons.[21]

The National Environmental Engineering Research Institute's reports of 1998, 1999, 2003 and 2005 all point out that the copper plant polluted the environment and flouted several standards and protocol laid down by the TNPCB under various acts.[22] Public anger, already simmering, reached a peak when the factory announced that the plant would be doubling its production capacity from 400,000 to 800,000 tonnes per year, which would have made the Thoothukudi smelter "one of the world's largest single-location copper smelting complexes."[23] Several Thoothukudi residents started protesting against the plant, demanding its immediate closure. Around 250 people were arrested on 24 February 2016 for going on an indefinite hunger strike.[24] The protesters had the support of several movements and associations. Several small businesses and trade associations shut their shops in solidarity with the protests.[25]

The protests went on day and night, with some protesters blocking all the gates to the Sterlite plant, and frequent arrests ensued.[26] Anti-Sterlite Forum, a coalition of several groups, movements and independent activists, planned a sit-in protest at the district collector's office on 22 May 2016 to mark the hundredth day of the protest. The police negotiated with the protesters to change the venue and make it into an attention-seeking protest.[27] On 22 May, though some took part in the protest at the venue proposed by the police, several others from across the district and state participated in the march towards the collector's office. The crowd grew larger and larger and therefore the other group joined the march as well.[28] As the protesters approached the collector's office, the police began lathi charging, firing teargas and shooting, allegedly without proper warning. Thirteen protesters, including a 17-year-old minor, were killed.[29] The death toll increased to 14 five months later, after a man succumbed to injuries sustained during the lathi charge.[30] Some fact-finding reports and activists claim that the death toll is at least 15.[31]

The police assault and firing left over a hundred injured and at least 19 severely injured and in a critical state.[32] Of the people who died, four were Dalits;[33] 12 were men and two were women.[34] From the autopsy report accessed, it is revealed that at least 8 were shot from behind or the side and had been hit either in their head or heart. For two of them, the bullets pierced through the side of their head. For 17-year-old J Snowlin, the bullet pierced the head and exited through her mouth.

Of those who died, one was in his fifties, six were in their forties, three were in their early twenties and one was 17.[35]

The bullets also killed people who had not even taken part in the protest, such as Jhansi, who had gone to give fish curry to her daughter living two streets away, eight kilometers from the protest site, and died after a shot pierced through her ear and side of her head.[36] Reports and witnesses say that the police used disproportionate power and grossly violated several laws and protocols in place to be followed when opening fire.[37] [38]

Following the shootings, internet services were shut down in three districts for over a week.[39] The Tamil Nadu state chief minister alleged that anti-social elements had infiltrated the protest, and the police were forced to take this measure as a result.[40] The Vedanta chairman Anil Agarwal called the incident "absolutely unfortunate" and expressed his sympathy to the families of the deceased.[41]

On 28 May 2018, citing non-compliance with the rules, the Tamil Nadu Environmental Pollution and Forests Department sealed the Sterlite plant.[42] The case is currently before the Supreme Court in an appeal preferred by the Vedanta group against the High Court.[43] On 27 April 2021, the Supreme Court had allowed the Sterlite Copper premises to reopen to produce oxygen, since the demand for oxygen increased during the pandemic.[44]

The Madras High Court handed over all the cases relating to the police violence to the Central Bureau of Investigation on 14 August 2018.[45] The CBI has filed the charge sheet against 101 protesters and an inspector.[46] The Justice Aruna Jagadeesan Commission, appointed by the state government to probe the incident, submitted its report on 18 May 2022. The report named top officials in the incident and said the firing was "unprovoked," and the police had opened fire at "fleeing protesters."[47] The Madras High Court had intervened and ordered the National Human Rights Commission to submit its report on the matter after the commission, through its order dated 25 October 2018, announced the closure of the case, citing the ex-gratia compensation paid by the state government.[48]

Furthermore, during the 100 days of the non-violent protest, many individuals from marginalised communities, including Dalits and transgender persons, played a key role in leading the protest.[49] Nearby

villages with a higher number of marginalised people, such as Pandarampatti, were at the forefront of the protest against Sterlite.[50] Therespuram was one of the main areas where the police unleashed violence and began pursuing the protesters, where marginalised communities, especially Dalit Christians and fishermen who are known as "Catholic Fernandez," reside.

Out of the 14 people who died, four of them were Hindu Dalits, three belonged to the fishermen Dalit Christians, and the others belonged to dominant-Shudra castes (Other Backward Classes).[51] [52]

It is pertinent to note that there is evidence and testimonials that points to the casteist nature of police brutality. "The Day Tuticorin Burned," a People's Inquest Report, documents one such testimony from a victim who describes police officers physically abusing him upon learning about his (Dalit) caste identity.[53] Several "untouchability practices" are also known to persist in Thoothukudi, despite such practices being criminalised under the Indian Constitution and the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.[54] [55] After the shooting, the National Commission for Scheduled Castes investigated the matter. However, neither the report has been made public nor any actions or recommendations have been issued.[56]

METHODOLOGY

This study employs both quantitative and qualitative content analysis techniques. The quantitative analysis focusses on the Chennai edition of the Tamil daily *Dina Malar*, for 31 days from 7 May 2018 to 6 June 2018. It examines its coverage of the protest against the Sterlite Plant, the police crackdown on protesters that led to the killing of at least 14 people, and the events that followed. The qualitative analysis attempts to study how the incident was covered in a broader sense, using other possible sources, including court documents, official statements and so on.

QUANTITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS

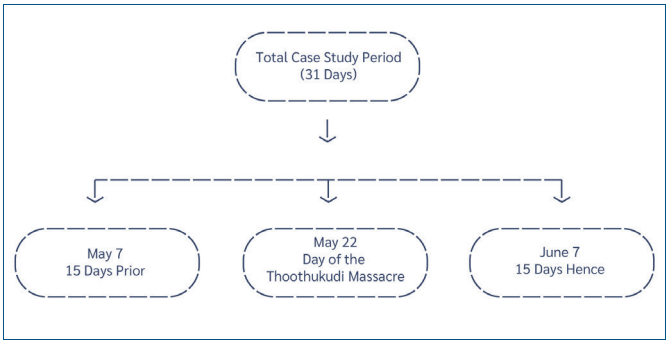


Chart A: Number of days analysed: 31 days

Total area analysed: 1196439.3 cm²

The following chart shows the distribution of the total area analysed:

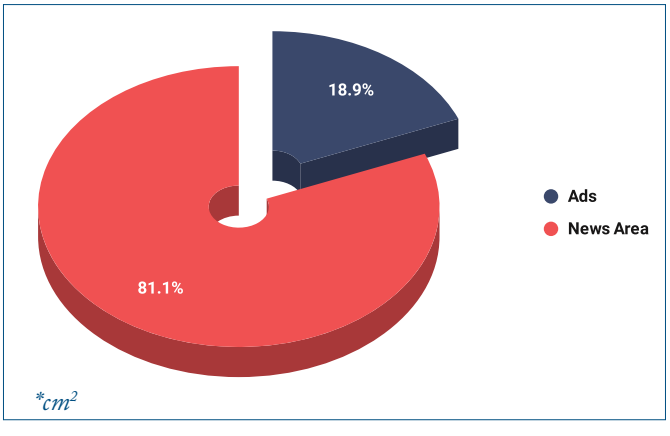


Chart B: Distribution of the Total Area Analysed

The following chart shows the distribution of the General News Area—a total editorial space (news area) of 970875.1 cm² (81.1%).

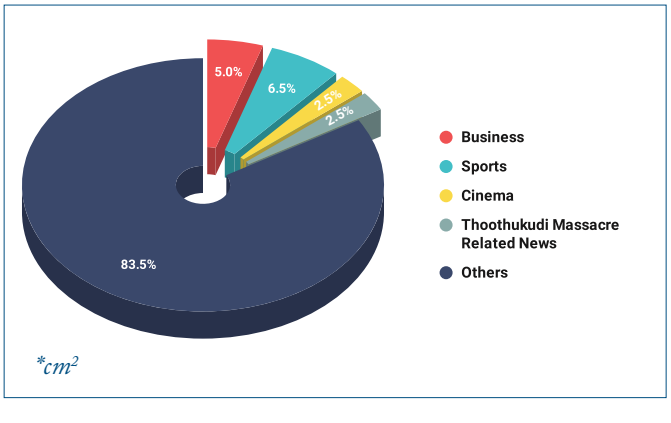


Chart C: Distribution of the General News Area Analysed

The chart below represents how news related to the Thoothukudi massacre was distributed (and the different categories it fell under):

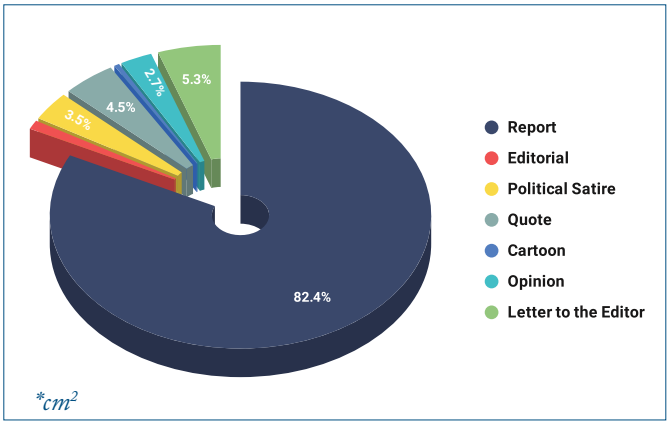


Chart D: Distribution of the News Related to the Thoothukudi Massacre

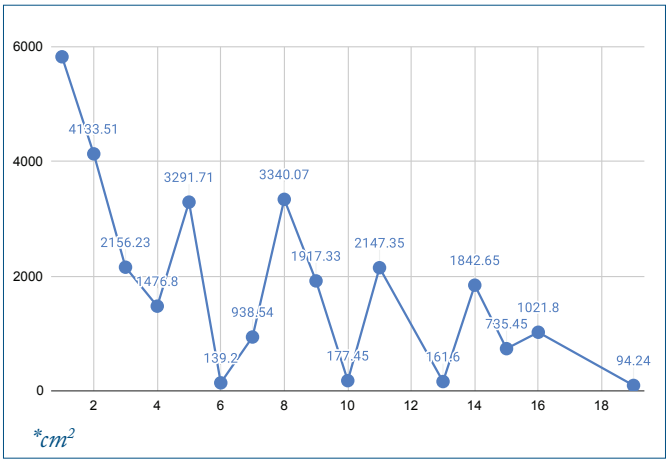


Chart E: Distribution of News Relating to the Thoothukudi Massacre (Page Prominence)

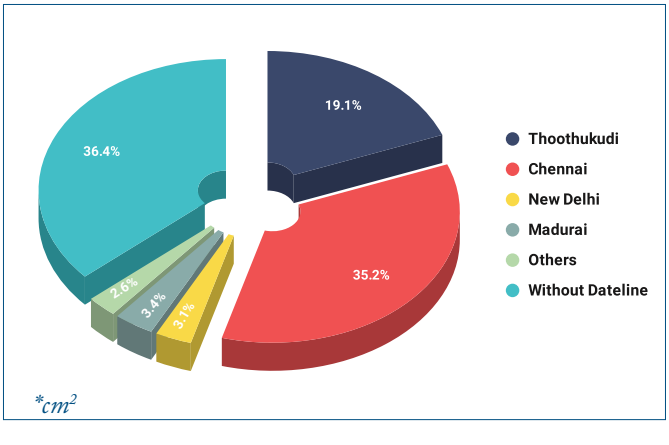


Chart F: Dateline Chart

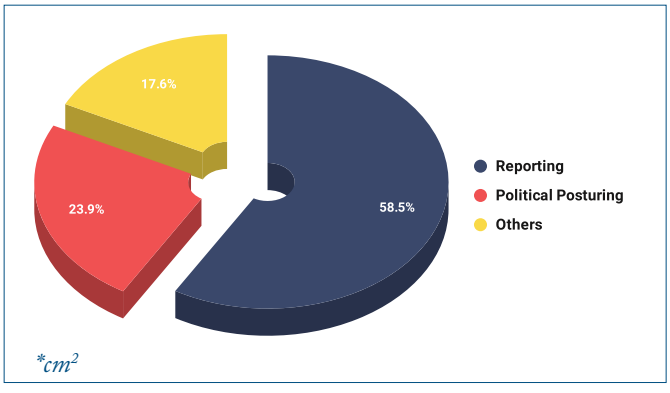
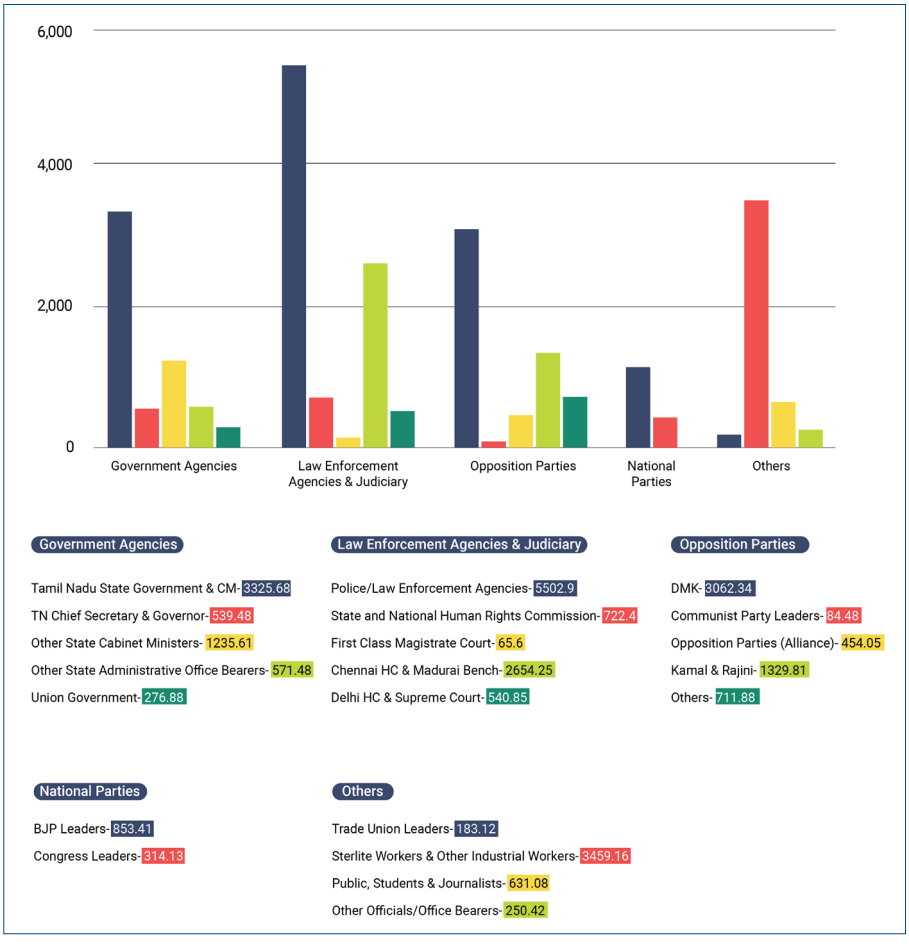


Chart G:General Theme

Points of view Represented

Chart H, below, shows the representation, in cm^2, received by each of the following interest groups:



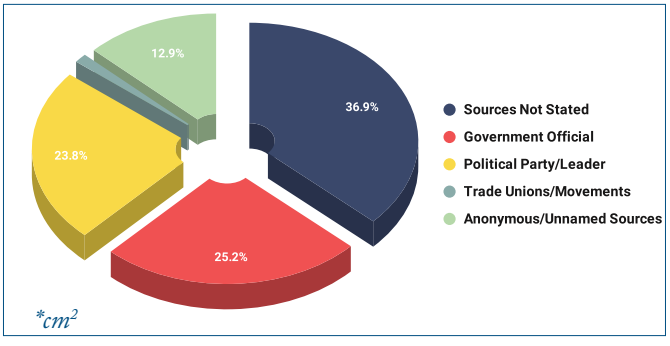


Chart I: Nature of the Source

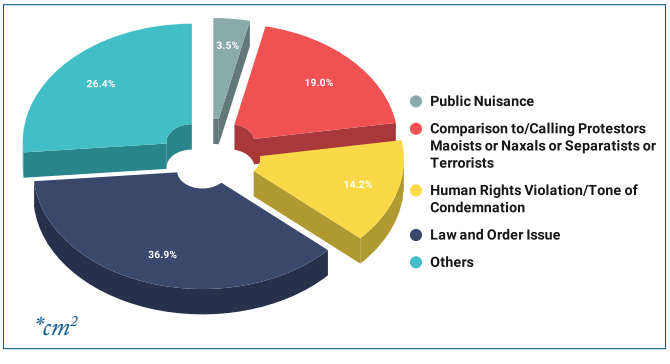


Chart J: Message Chart

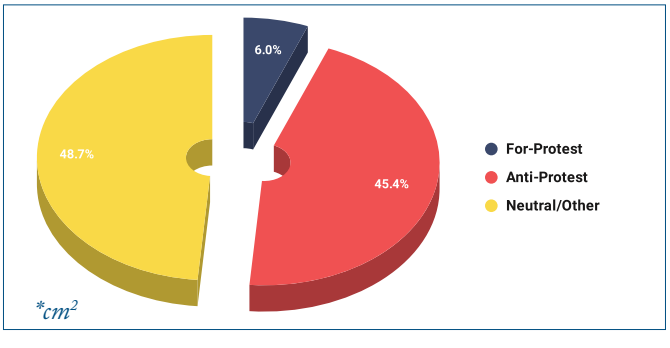


Chart K: Tone Chart

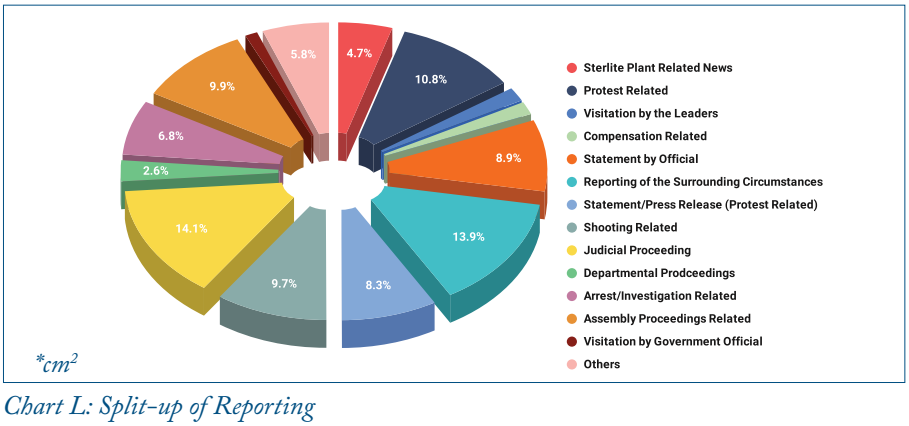
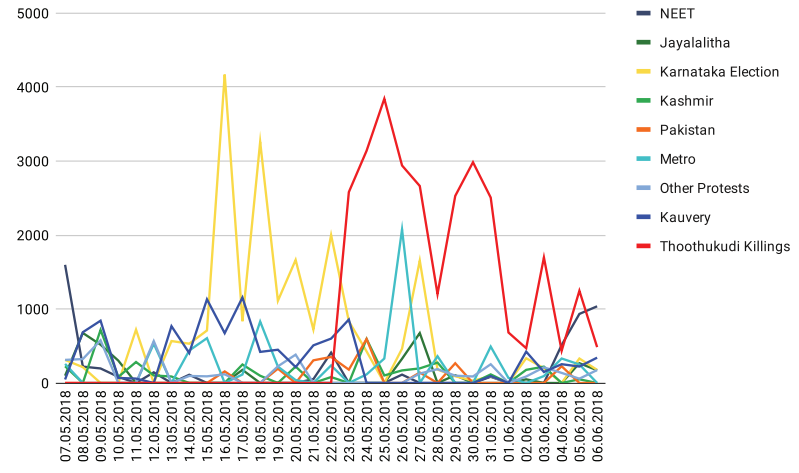


Chart L: Split-up of Reporting

Coverage of Thoothukudi massacre-related news, in comparison with other news that gained attention in the same period (31 days)



INFERENCES

Out of the space analysed, advertisements occupy 225564.22 cm^2 (as shown in Chart B). That leaves 970875.1 cm^2 of editorial (general news) space. Out of the editorial space, the business section took up 59588.4 cm^2; the sports section was around 78084.75 cm^2; the cinema section was around 29929.05 cm^2. News coverage related to the massacre came to approximately 29400.56 cm^2, about 2 percent of the total news area studied for the period, as shown in Chart C.

From Chart D, we learn that most of the pieces in the newspaper were in the form of general news reports, followed by letters to the editor and quotes. Chart E reveals that most of the massacre-related news was featured on page 1, followed by pages 2 and 8. Chart C and E clearly show that the Thoothukudi massacre news had prominence in the newspaper to an extent. (The sharp increase in coverage, shown in Chart M, also further demonstrates this inference.) It should also be noted that page 8 is dedicated to letters to the editor, political satire and statements by political leaders.

Chart F shows that a majority of the news were without any date-lines, as many of the news reports were in the format of "hearsay." The

chart also indicates that the majority of the news reports were datelined to Chennai and not Thoothukudi, where the protests and the massacre had ensued. Thoothukudi only had 19 percent of the coverage, followed by Madurai with 4 percent, New Delhi with 3 percent and others with 3 percent. Thus, it is evident that the majority of the reporting was not done from the ground. Chart G shows the prevalence of the general theme of the articles featured in the newspaper were general reporting, followed by political posturing and others.

Chart H presents an analysis of the coverage in terms of points of views represented. It reveals that the majority of the reports or articles had the police or law enforcement agency's lens, and victims or the family of the victims were not represented even in a single column. The newspaper gave the second-most coverage to the "public," followed by the Tamil Nadu state government and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister. It should be clarified that views of the "public" are not to be construed as unbiased; it is instead very subjective, and they were mainly used to indirectly push the state's narrative. After these, the point of views most represented were from the DMK, its leader MK Stalin, and the Madras High Court. Other political party leaders, apart from Kamal Hasan, Rajinikanth and a couple of BJP leaders, did not get any considerable space. It should be noted that most of them only ever received the little coverage from their statement featured on page 8, and not with a separate column.

Chart I reveals that most of the news did not have any source attribution. The sources that were named in reports were mostly government officials, closely followed by a political party or leaders. Thirteen percent of the news had "anonymous or unnamed" sources. Chart J shows the different kinds of messaging the reports present. A significant amount of the coverage—37 percent—framed it as a law-and-order issue, while 19 percent compared the protesters directly to Maoists, Naxals, separatists, terrorists or miscreants. It should be noted that the same narrative coincided with the state's excuse for the shooting and brutality unleashed on 22 May and 23 May. (The state gave the same reason during the police crackdown on the Jallikattu protesters a year before, in January 2017.) The reports that had a slight tone of condemnation regarding the killings comprised just 14 percent—those in this category were mainly relating to statements issued by political parties or leaders in condemnation of the lathi charge, shootings and killings.

Chart K examines in detail the common themes of the reporting. Fourteen percent of the news reports were only concerned with describing surrounding circumstances, such as how bus transportation was disturbed due to the protests that followed the shooting on 22 May. The chart also reveals that 10 percent of the reports covered the news related to the shooting, and 11 percent covered the aftermath protests.

Chart L reveals that only 6 percent of the news carried for-protest views and 45 percent of the news brought anti-protest views. Even though most of the reports appear to have had a neutral approach, they were not explicitly against the protest or the protesters per se but had several undertones against the protests.

From Chart M, it is clear that the newspaper even had editorial space for the Karnataka election but did not have any space allotted to the protests that were ongoing in Thoothukudi in a peaceful manner for nearly 100 days before the shooting on 22 and 23 May. From the very sharp increase in coverage following the shooting, we learn that the incident was highlighted as a law-and-order issue from the very start.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

The quantitative content analysis shows that while the protest went on for almost 100 days before the shooting, the coverage of the Sterlite protests started only on 23 May, after the first instance of police firing. Before 23 May, the newspaper had covered various incidents, including celebrities' weddings, such as the weddings of Sonam Kapoor and Anand Ahuja, or Prince Harry and Megan Markle. There were two news reports related to the Sterlite factory before 23 May—one was on 18 May, with the title, "There is no damage in the last five years, Sterlite argues to the Tribunal," and one on 19 May, with the title, "High Court orders the police to reconsider protection for the Sterlite factory." Neither mentioned the ongoing protests.

Even before the coverage of the Sterlite shooting began, the newspaper appears to have had an anti-protest stand—at least in relation to protests staged within the state. For example, the coverage of the government-school teachers' rally focussed on how it resulted in massive traffic in the city. On the other hand, news coverage of the Gujjar protest, in which the protesters blocked railway tracks, did not have

anti-protest terms or connotations. On 7 May, an editorial in the newspaper called the protests "attention-seeking acts." Additionally, the newspaper also had an opinion piece on "news pollution" in its 13 May publication, which criticised "breaking news culture," mainly relating to deaths that occurred in the aftermath of the National Eligibility Entrance Test and the usage of clever wordplay by the news channels while covering such instances, which the report opined were "provoking." (Ironically, though, this newspaper is notorious for using word plays itself; for example, a headline for a report on a bomb blast in Sri Lanka in 2019 read "Ohh... Jesus"—in the Tamil language context, the phrase is used to ridicule the Christian minority).

The newspaper was very blunt in its portrayal of the anti-Sterlite protests and the subsequent police shootings: the reports state that it was a riot, that violence was firstly perpetuated by the "rioters" and that the police had no choice but to resort to gunfire. On 23 May, the very first headline on the first page read, "AMUCK! Anti-Sterlite protests turned violent in Thoothukudi for four hours; police attacked; vehicles set on fire; the collector's office vandalised and looted; 10 people killed in firing while dispersing the mob."

A pattern emerged as the newspaper continued its coverage of the incident. The newspaper used the term "violence" directly 83 times, from 23 May to 16 June. In the same period, the terms "riot" was used 64 times, "attacked" 13 times, "stone pelting" 14 times, [set on] "fire" 50 times, "vandalised" 8 times and "tension/turmoil" 21 times. Even though the term "gun firing" was used 271 times, these instances were most often structured within a phrase that reiterated that the police had no choice, or the word was used as a prefix to point to the "incident."

On the same day, the other news coverage included how journalists were also attacked by the protesters. The last paragraph mentioned how some of them were attacked by police personnel, too. Relief funds to the victims' families and a statement that the government will not support a scheme that people disapprove of comprised other news reports that the paper covered on the same day.

One news report suggested that intelligence agencies had failed to alert the state about Maoist infiltration of the protesters—it did not have any sources, named or otherwise. This pattern continued throughout the paper's coverage of the Sterlite shootings, where almost half

of the news reports had no sources, or a few anonymous sources, and made claims in the guise of reports. This also includes claims that it is the habit of "extreme" leftist cadres, Maoists or Naxals, to infiltrate protests and eventually turn them violent; examples were provided of a few protests in the past that had ended with police violence and were all later claimed, by the state, to have been infiltrated by "anti-social elements." Significantly, the newspaper mainly mentioned a few radical movements when writing such reports. References to the protesters as Maoists, Naxals, anti-nationals, anti-socials and other similar words increased after the first few days. In total, from 23 May to 16 June, similar terms were directly mentioned 165 times in the newspaper.

On 24 May, the news continued to emphasise that gunfire was the last resort of the police due to the protestors' violence and riots that broke out. Despite the gunfire killing one more person the previous day (that is, on 23 May), the headline of the newspaper mostly focused on how political leaders visiting relatives of the victims in the hospitals kept the district in turmoil and that their visits were staged drama. The killing of one more person was covered on page 3, with the title, "Violence continues for the second day in Thoothukudi; police bus set on fire; youth dies in gunfire." In the subsequent days, the coverage moved to how "normal life" was returning to the city while also covering the incidents of increased police protection in several places throughout the state, including the state assembly building.

The newspaper also had significant coverage of how the police plan to arrest people under several laws, including the National Security Act, should anyone speak in a video (publicly or on social media) against the incident. Such coverage, without named sources, mentioned "police sources" or similar words, and had a threatening tone. The newspaper also moved to another narrative that suggested all the protests that were staged to condemn the incident were causing a public nuisance. This narrative continued as the newspaper assumed the role of the public and continued to criticise the fact that "public" life was disrupted due to such protests. Additionally, the coverage suggested that the opposition party's (predominantly the DMK) protests were a failure, and that people do not identify with that party due to their return to "protest politics." The paper also covered the closing order of the government against the Sterlite factory and judicial proceedings, as well as several public-interest litigations demanding relief to the families of the de-

ceased victims. Oddly, though the newspaper covered points of view from the Sterlite workers on how their livelihoods will be affected by the government's decision to close the factory and how much revenue the state will lose, not a single quote or bit of news was reported about the victims' relatives, apart from the reports that covered their pleas to the court and the state to return the victims' bodies to perform final rituals.

Preposterously, the newspaper only had one editorial on the matter, which raised the question of "whether Tamil Nadu was becoming Uttar Pradesh and Bihar." In the first half, the editorial piece analysed how multinational companies like Vedanta continue to operate in violation of several pollution-related laws of the land. The second half analysed how Tamil Nadu has become Uttar Pradesh and Bihar due to Naxal infiltration of the protests. The newspaper carried 11 letters to the editor that touched upon the killing, none of which condemned the incident. They only countered the criticism raised against the actor Rajinikanth, the newspaper and many others for their statements that suggested that the police had to adopt extreme measures due to the anti-nationals' infiltration.

None of the coverage had any remote condemnation of the killings, apart from the reports that were issued by political leaders in their condemnation statements and press releases, and the word "state violence" was used only four times. Other news channels covered, more extensively, the pictures and videos of police personnel shooting at the protesters with advanced machine guns; other police personnel hyping them by saying, "at least one [protester] must die"; police personnel setting several vehicles on fire; police kicking a person (who eventually died) and asking them not to "act" after shooting them. This newspaper did not even acknowledge the very existence of these viral videos. In fact, the only criticism the coverage had towards the state was that the intelligence agencies and the state had failed to notice the infiltration of "anti-social elements." The language used made it appear as though the protest was a law-and-order issue that needed to be taken care of, which warranted extreme measures by the police, such as gunfire.

Despite the gravity of the protest and state-wide support, *Dina Malar* did not cover it before the violence. The reports did not even try to conceal the paper's state-centred narrative. Instead, the newspaper attempted, and quite succeeded, in convincingly portraying the protest as a violence-inciting law-and-order issue.

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ANALYSING HOW THE INDIAN EXPRESS COVERED AN UPPER-CASTE MOB TORCHING 55 DALIT HOUSES IN GOHANA, HARYANA

/ Vinod K Jose

ABSTRACT

This chapter analyses the media reporting of a caste conflict in Gohana, Haryana, in August 2005. The content analysis of the media reporting of the conflict is carried out using both quantitative and qualitative research. The quantitative analysis focuses on a particular newspaper—The Indian Express—*for a particular period (a month). However, the qualitative analysis goes beyond the quantitative measurement of newspaper coverage, and attempts to study the issue, making use of all possible sources, including court documents, notices, pamphlets and extensive interviews to understand the aspects of the conflict that the media covered or ignored.*

The case study of the Gohana caste conflict reveals that the media almost ignored it. It hardly found media coverage beyond 344 sq cm (less than 0.02 percent of the total news area studied for the period in The Indian Express*). The coverage that was done lacked on-the-ground reporting of the conflict and missed key details, context and viewpoints; the build-up of the conflict was completely ignored, and violence had to occur for the conflict to attract media attention; all the sources were invariably from the police and other govern-*

ment agencies; and finally, there was no attempt to relate the conflict to larger social debates on caste. Other than the magazine Frontline, *none of the newspapers brought out factors such as the above or the growing intolerance of the Jaats, the land-owning castes towards the upward mobility of the Dalits. It fits with a larger conclusion, that conflicts that arise as a result of social segregation, as seen with the Gohana conflict, often get very little media attention, contributing to the creation of a false public-consciousness that modern communities are caste-free.*

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INTRODUCTION

Annually, 100,000 caste-related conflicts or atrocities are reported from India, according to Human Rights Watch in 2005, the year of the Gohana violence studied. The National Crime Bureau's annual reports show a consistent increase in caste violence over the years, and it is in the region of 10-15 percent annually.

Supportive of the National Crime Bureau statistics of growing caste conflicts is a survey, conducted recently in 500 villages, by Shah et al and titled *Untouchability in Rural India*.[1] Some key pointers below would explain how prevalent caste-based discriminations are in the day-to-day life of a person born in one of the lowered castes.

- More than 50 percent of villages deny low castes entry into non-low-caste houses and into temples
- Almost 50 percent of villages deny low castes access to some water facilities, ban marriage processions of low castes, and prohibit them from selling milk to cooperatives
- One-fourth of villages have separate drinking in water in schools for low castes

Setting up on fire 55 Dalit houses in Gohana:

Gohana town in the state of Haryana is, situated about 80 kilometres from Delhi. The caste rivalry between the Jaats and the Valmikis had caused tension between the two in Gohana over years.

Jaats enjoy a prominent position in Haryana. They are the largest land-owning community and the most politically vocal caste group of the state. The Jaats make up about 25 percent in the state. On the other hand, Valmikis occupy the lowest strata, even in the Dalit communities. The Valmikis, historically pushed to do sanitation work or manual scavenging, are considered lower than the Jaatavs (caste that lives on leather-based works) and Sansi (shepherds and cattle growers), the other prominant groups in the region. The Valmikis comprise only four percent of the state population.[2]

On 31 August 2005, members in the the landlord Jaat community burned down 55 Dalit houses, and Dalits fled the town en masse. A

violent mob of about 1,500 to 2,000 Jaats, armed with spears, batons, petrol and kerosene went on a spree, burning down houses belonging to the Valmikis.

This incident is a clear case of caste conflict, since it was drawn over caste differences. Also, the National Crime Records Bureau had recorded 288 cases of violence against the Dalits in Haryana in 2005, and the Gohana incident is one of them. Therefore, the case study of the media coverage of Gohana, is qualified to be called a "caste conflict," and the selection of the case to study how media covered it is thus justified.

Interest groups in the Gohana Caste Conflict:

- Members of the Valmiki community, who stayed in the Valmiki colony in Gohana
- Bhagwan Valmiki Sena, a Valmiki caste organisation in Gohana
- Akhil Bharatiya Valmiki Samaja, the national front organisation of members of the Valmiki caste
- Dalit Mahapanchayat, meeting of the different caste leaders in the Dalit community
- Members of the Jaat community
- Gohana Jaat Caste Panchayat, meeting of members of the Jaat community in Gohana
- All India Jaat Mahasabha
- Police
- Congress Party
- BJP
- The accused in the caste violence: Pradeep and Ranbir, the son and brother of BJP national vice-president Kishan Singh Sangwan, and the lone BJP MP from Haryana in the 2004-09 Lok Sabha
- Indian National Lok Dal

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

The quantitative study employs content analysis of *The Indian Express*,

New Delhi edition—for a period of 31 days, between 16 August 2005 and 15 September 2005.

Content Analysis – The Indian Express, New Delhi edition

Chart 1:

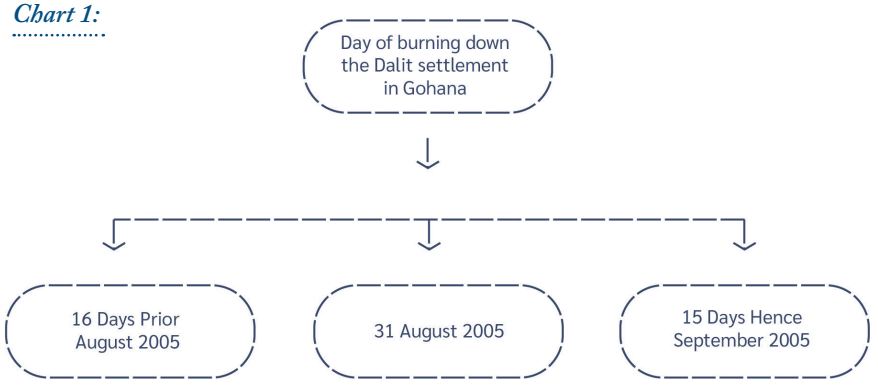


Chart 2: Distribution of Total Area in the Content Analysed

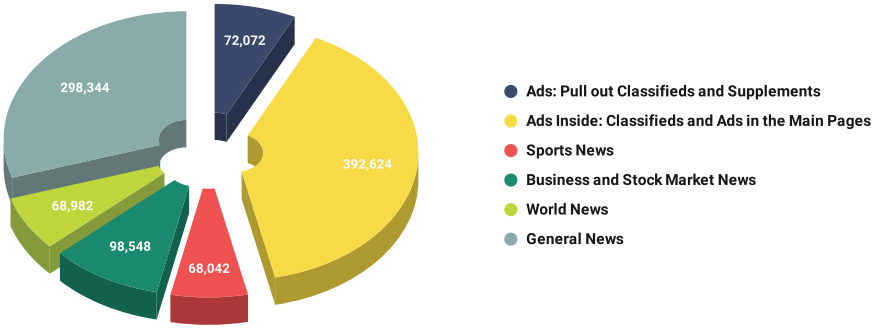


Chart 3: Distribution of Gohana-Related News in the Total News Area

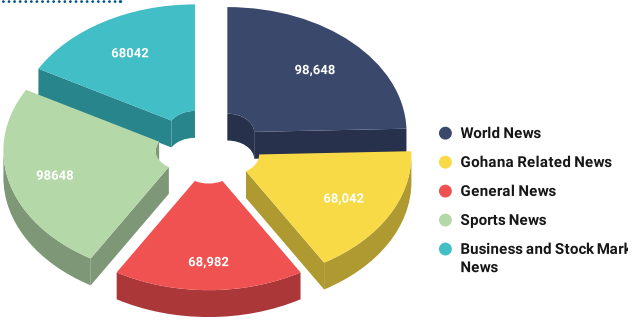
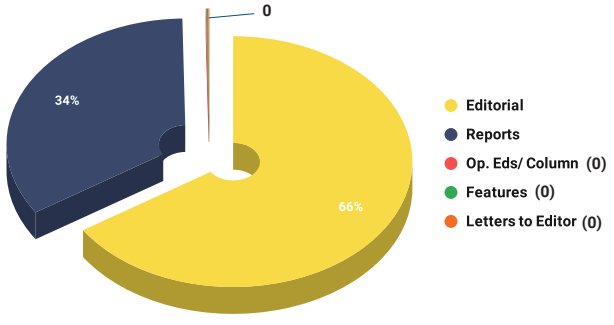


Chart 4: Distribution of Gohana-Related News



The coverage on Gohana was a meagre 334 sq cm, lacked on-the-ground reporting of the conflict and missed details. Even though the newspaper had taken a blanket editorial position against caste atrocities, the missing specificities of the conflict and the mere absence of coverage in terms of area and display raises the question of "marginalisation" of caste conflicts in media, such as this.[3]

Points of View Represented in the Gohana Caste Conflict-Related News:

The coverage of Gohana caste conflict, of 334 sq cm, is less than 0.02 percent of the total news area studied for the period in *The Indian Express*. The coverage ignores most viewpoints in the conflict. Below are the different voices heard in the newspaper reporting (see Chart 5):

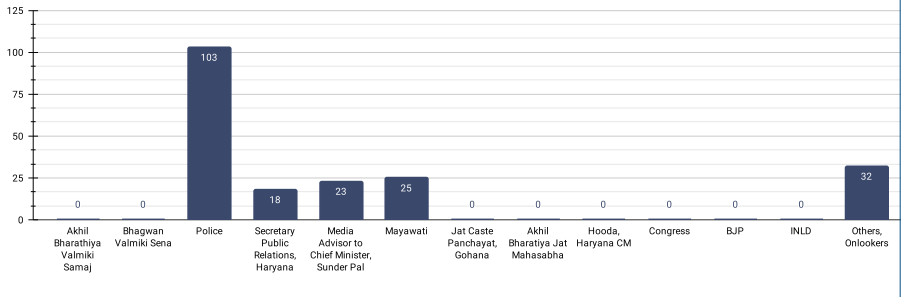
- Police
- Secretary Public Relations, Haryana State, Sanjay Kothari
- Media Advisor to Chief Minister, Sunder Pal
- Attributes one graph to "the villagers," but without naming any names.
- Mayawati

The report did not have any representation of these points of view (See Chart 5):

- Residents in the Valmiki Colony, Gohana
- Bhagwan Valmiki Sena and leader Lara

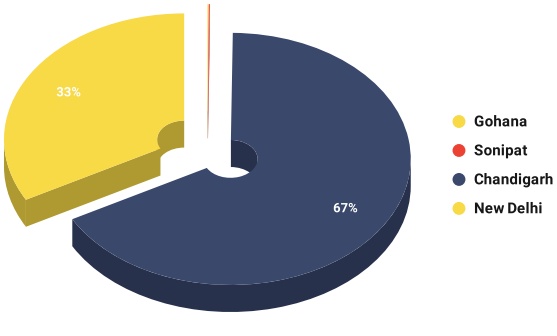
- Akhil Bharatiya Valmiki Samaja
- Dalit Mahapanchayat
- Jaat Caste Panchayat
- Baljeet Rabra, Gohana Jaat Panchayat leader
- All India Jaat Mahasabha
- Pradeep Sangwan and Ranbir Sangwan, son and brother of the BJP National Vice-President Kishan Singh Sanghwan and the local MP
- Bhupinder Sigh Hooda, Chief Minister of Haryana
- Congress Party
- BJP
- INLD
- Others

Chart 5: Point of View Represented



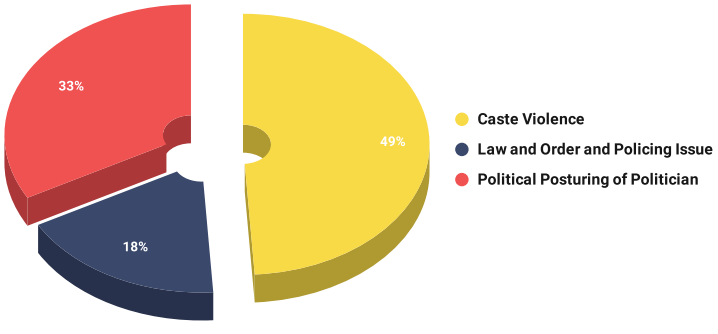
*in words

Chart 6: Distribution of Gohana-Related News



The dateline chart shows how the coverage had no reports filed from Gohana or Sonipat. While the report from Chandigarh appeared on the day after the torching incident, the Delhi-dateline report that came three days later had very little coverage on the Gohana case violence and more on Mayawati's "political posturing" ahead of the Uttar Pradesh state elections after having visited Gohana.

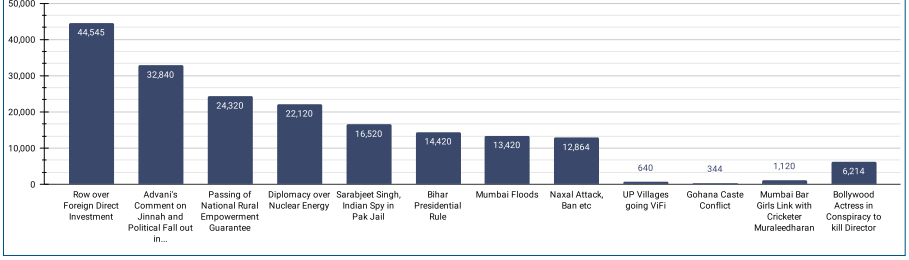
Chart 7: Messege Chart



The following chart shows the news items that received more coverage in this period than Gohana.

Chart 8: News that Found Larger Media Space than Gohana

Caste Violence-Aug 16, 2006 to Sept 15, 2005



QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

The case study of the Gohana caste conflict would stand out because the media almost ignored it. Other than the editorial, a Chandigarh-dateline report on the torching, and a Delhi-dateline report on Mayawati's alleged political posturing, there was little coverage on the Gohana conflict in *The Indian Express*. The newspaper also stayed away

from reporting on the CBI taking charge of the investigation, National Commission for Scheduled Castes' report to Haryana government, and several independent fact-finding reports submitted to the National Human Rights Commission by a number of Dalit and human-rights organisations, among others.

The wire agency *Press Trust of India (PTI),* with a Sonipat dateline, had covered the incident. But it also did not make it to the newspaper, even though it takes PTI stories regularly. *The Indian Express* also chose not to accompany the leading Dalit politicians, Mayawati or Ram Vilas Paswan visiting Gohana, or the Left leaders like Brinda Karat or Dipankar Mukherjee when they visited Gohana after the violence. A caste conflict like Gohana, therefore, hardly found media coverage beyond the 344 sq cm (00.003 percent of the total news area of 2, 98,344 cm^2).

Hence, the qualitative part studies the aspect of the conflict that the media excluded from its coverage, and examines the conflict's context. It tries to understand what happened on 31 August 2005, the events that led to the burning of Dalit houses, the history of the caste conflict in Gohana and Haryana in general, and what followed the violence.

The immediate reason for the members of the Jaat community to set the Balmiki colony on fire was the murder of a young Jaat man in Gohana on 27 August 2005. According to the FIRs,[4] a group of men from the Valmiki community beat Baljeet Siwach to death on 27 August 2005.

The police FIR had named seven people in the murder case of Siwach, the owner of a studio in Gohana. According to the CBI case in the Special CBI Court in Ambala, Siwach and his friends had made lewd remarks about the wife of Shiv Kumar, a driver in Chandigarh State Transport Department and resident of Valmiki Colony, who visited Sawan studio and asked how much it would cost to take a family photograph for a ration card.[5]

Siwach's friend, Ashok Kumar, who is also a partner of Sawan studio, commented that if Shiv Kumar brought his wife to the shop, he would get discount of Rs. 5.[6] This resulted in verbal abuse and a scuffle, with the situation soon getting out of control and more people from the adjacent Valmiki Colony gathering in a short time. Ashok Kumar and others ran away, while Siwach escaped to the second floor of the building. There, he was beaten up by Shiv Kumar and five others, and died of

fractured ribs on the left side of his chest and a wound on the front side of the skull.[7] By the evening of 27 August 2005, the Jaat community took the incident as an attack on their pride by the lower caste people and began mobilising support.[8]

The district administration anticipated trouble: the local police were alerted and some sub-inspectors and station house officers were posted in areas thought to be volatile. The Jaat community gave the police names of seven members of the Valmiki community to be arrested in connection with Baljeet Siwach's murder. First on the list was the name of Lara, alias Rakesh, a young leader of the Valmiki Community at large (the CBI investigation later revealed that there was no evidence against Lara and he was discharged from the case).

The police FIR filed at Gohana station,[9] had all the names the Jaat leaders proposed, beginning with Lara alias Rakesh. The police arrested four of the seven charged in FIR. But the Jaats were not happy with that. Two days later, on 29 August 2005, a Jaat panchayat was convened. It openly declared that unless all the offenders were brought to book and the chief minister visited Gohana within 48 hours, "they would burn down the Valmikis and their colony."[10]

This led to the fleeing of the Valmikis from the Colony. In an op-ed piece published in *The Hindu* in 2005, P Sainath describes the power of such caste panchayats over the rule of law:

> *Note the manner in which the Dalits were 'punished'. In true feudal tradition, an individual offence became a collective crime. A Dalit is alleged to have killed someone. All Dalits in his basti must pay the price. The due course of law gets dumped. The caste panchayat reigns higher than the courts.*

The deadline declared by the Gohana Jaat Panchayat was over by 31 August 2005. That morning, a very influential Jaat Panchayat, Barah Khap, constituted by representatives of the Jaat community from 12 nearby villages, met in Gohana.[11] It was a small group of village elders who were not convinced that justice had been done. Several young men also joined the group. They were led by Pradeep Sangwan, son of member of Parliament and BJP National Vice-President, Kishan Singh Sangwan, also joined the Barah Khap held at the Gohana Sabzi Mandi.[12]

The administration was informed of the meeting, and it gave permission. The police made another trip to the Valmiki Colony, making sure nobody stayed back there. "The police told us they might not be able to control the situation and forced us to flee," said Lajwanti Kumari, a 64-year-old resident of the colony who escaped to her cousin's house in Alwar, Rajasthan on the morning of 31 August.

A fact-finding investigation[13] carried out only two days after the torching incident described the attack:

> *By 11.30 a.m. hundreds of Jaat youth assembled at the Samta Chowk, where the Balmiki Basti is located. They came in tens of tractors and armed with barrels of fuel and crackers. The arson and looting went on for over five hours: the extent of damage to each house testifies to the leisurely pace at which the mob must have indulged in the violence. Such had been the intensity of the fire that even ceramic washbasins had been burnt away. It is inconceivable that the mob could have continued this rampant frenzy of violence without the active connivance and blessings of the police and district administration. Indeed several people reported that the police discouraged the fire fighters by saying that they risked being electrocuted if they attempted to douse the fire. It should be noted that at least four district headquarters lie within a radius of 40 kms from Gohana. Yet, no attempt was made by the local officials to call in extra police forces to ensure the maintenance of peace and order in the town.*
>
> *The lanes of Valmiki Basti are far narrower than those in the rest of the town. But this Dalit neighbourhood had been showing signs of relative prosperity over the past few years. Some of the houses are double-storied and some had modern gadgets such as refrigerators, washing machines, televisions and music systems. These were the homes that provoked the vandalising mob the most.*[14]

The common parlance among the upper-caste society in Gohana is that the Dalits of Gohana, especially the Valmikis, have started doing well economically. The good days, of course, came after a long, hard struggle. Many of them have jobs as municipal workers in the local corporation and as garbage collectors. Some members of the community

have benefited from job reservations. The younger generation, however, does not fancy a future as sweepers on the municipality's payroll. The young people want to improve socially and economically, through higher studies.[15] A growing number of them are studying professional courses; one of them is doing a Master's degree course in Computer Applications. But this worldly success, however, did not translate into social acceptability for the Valmikis. They were aware that the upper castes look down upon them and the youth found it hard to take.[16]

The Valmikis were more organised than other Dalit groups. They had their own welfare organisations, and even separate temples and, of late, the Valmikis had been expressing their resentment quite openly as they had a bold leader, Lara.[17] Lara, a 30-year-old son of Mangal Ram, a social leader of the community and president of Bhagwan Valmiki Sena, successfully organised the community and won a legal battle over a few land developers from the Jaat community who wanted to appropriate the community land of the Valmikis.[18] Tracing the background of the conflict in Gohana, the National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights said[19]:

> *[sic] A case was filed in the local court by some Jaats which later on was found to be fictitious. But in this crisis the Jaats were ably aided and assisted by the then Deputy Superintendent of Police at Gohana, Mr. Kuldeep Sivach. The tension has been simmering since a long time. The Balmikis and other Dalit families in Gohana have refused over the years to do beggars (forced labour) and also after getting educated have been working at various places engaged in Government jobs and some petty businesses too. The killing of Baljit Singh on 27 August 2005 gave an opportunity to the Jaats to teach a lesson to Dalits especially the Balmikis about showing them their place in the society.*

There was also another incident of a Jaat youth allegedly molesting a Valmiki woman at a religious congregation organised by the community in 2004. The Valmiki men protested, and in the scuffle, a man from the dominant community, who had allegedly molested a Valmiki woman, was murdered.

The Valmikis' answer to the growing resistance they put up against the Jaats was that they hit back only after they were provoked. "They

often ridiculed us and passed comments forcing us to retaliate," said Midhun Kumar, in 2009. A social activist in Gohana and a surgeon in Shanti Hospital in Gohana said, "Torching the Valmiki Colony was the vent-out of the years' long anger in Jaat community against the Valmikis who had been prospering economically and showing boldness as a community. Their leader, Lara symbolised this rising power of the Valmikis."[20]

In a rare piece of on-the-ground-reporting on Gohana, *Frontline* magazine's TK Rajalakshmi reported[21]:

> *It is distressing how most people in the area, barring the Valmikis of course, are not shocked at the arson. While some people accuse the media of defaming the Jaats, others say the Valmikis brought it upon themselves. A former schoolteacher said the arson was "unfortunate" but "inevitable". "Tell me, how come they are called Dalits when they live in pucca homes?" he said, adding that whereas the Jaat farmers were not well off at all, the Dalits had built houses costing lakhs. "When Siwach died, none of the shops was closed, but now some groups have declared a Haryana bandh in support of the Valmikis. Is it fair?" There is a murmur here that the Valmikis "brought it upon themselves", that they were "asking for it". For not all Valmikis, it seems, are willing to sweep and clean any more.*

The changing labour relations, social mobility of the Dalits, and the community's prosperity, reflected in material possessions like televisions, motor bikes and so on, resulted in furthering the prejudice and anger of the Jaats. Other than *Frontline*, none of the newspapers brought out factors such as the above or the growing intolerance of the Jaats.

What followed the torching incident was a series of high-profile visits to the Valmiki Colony, from Haryana Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda, Left party leaders like Brinda Karat, Dipankar Mukherjee and the BSP leader and the then opposition leader in the Uttar Pradesh legislative assembly, Mayawati.

The Indian Express's Delhi-dateline report on Mayawati focused on explaining an otherwise "belligerent" Dalit politician's milder position on Gohana. The report titled, "Mayawati takes Centre route on Gohana arson," had a lead paragraph that began:

> *The usually belligerent BSP chief has stepped back on the Gohana question. Mayawati has let off both the Congress government in Haryana and the UPA government on the looting and burning of more than 50 Dalit homes on Wednesday, only writing to the Prime Minister to express her displeasure and seek an independent inquiry.*

The Indian Express reporter, Vrinda Gopinath, interviewed Mayawati in Delhi after she returned from Gohana. Based on the following quote from Mayawati, the report chose to suggest that she was taking a milder path:

> *Now that it is clear the atrocities on the Dalits in Gohana were pre-planned by the perpetrators, with the full knowledge of the state and district authorities, I am writing to Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh, asking him for a free and fair investigation, like (by) the CBI, to book the culprits," Mayawati said, in an exclusive interview to The Indian Express. "We will also demand for full compensation for the loss of property and homes of the victims.*

The Indian Express chose not to send any reporters to Gohana, even though the town was merely a two hours' drive from Delhi. Neither did it publish any wire stories from the *Press Trust of India* or the *United News of India*, which had carried shorter, but on-the-ground reports.

On the day after the torching, a report appeared on *The Indian Express*, titled "Mob torches 50 Dalit Houses in Sonepat," and datelined from Chandigarh. It had a total of six paragraphs, out of which 103 words were attributed to "police," 32 to "villagers," 28 to the Media Advisor of the Haryana Chief Minister, Sunder Pal and 19 words to the Secretary, Public Relations Department of Haryana State, Sanjay Kothari.

How did the Chadigarh dateline story, attribute a paragraph to "villagers," without actually naming it to anyone, raises questions of journalistic accuracy. Not only was the information attributed to the "villagers" factually incorrect, but it was the version of the story told by either the police or the dominant Jaat community, with the neu-

tral-sounding cover-up of attribution—"villagers said."

This is the paragraph attributed to "villagers":

> *"The police had booked seven persons in the case [death of Baljeet, a Jaat], arrested four and hunting for the remaining three in Balmiki Basti, which was why the Dalits had deserted the settlement, villagers said."*

But the CBI charge sheet, court records and local cable-news broadcast on the days of the events and interviews with the community members clarifies the fact that it was not the fear of police arrest of three accused in the case that caused 55 Valmiki families to flee their homes. Rather, it was the threat that the Jaat Panchayat would burn down the Valmikis and their colony in Samta Chowk, and the police going from house to house in Valmiki Colony asking them to flee, which resulted in the Valmikis deserting their houses by 31 August 2005 when the Jaats torched the colony. So the attribution of "villagers said," in the report on 1 September 2005 is factually incorrect and ethically questionable without specifying whether the neutral-sounding attribution, "villagers," were actually one side of the conflict.

Even many days after the torching incident, there was strong rumours that the Jaats were not satisfied with their revenge, since they fell short of killing any Valmikis in retaliation for Baljeet Sivach's murder. A Hindi newspaper—page 4 of the *Dainik Tribune* on 12 October 2005—reported that most of the Valmiki Colony residents did not sleep in their houses, and that by night-time they had left for the wilderness nearby, fearing attacks from the Jaat community. There was no report to that effect in the national press.

There were also two bandhs, Haryana state and national bandhs, or shutdowns, organised by the Dalit and Left parties. But none of this found space in *The Indian Express*.

In whatever little coverage there was, the police remained a major source in the conflict (as shown in Chart 5) in *The Indian Express*. The Hindi newspaper coverage was no different. The police was the main source, and often paragraphs after paragraphs were attributed to the police without naming any officer. Reiterations like "police has taken measures," "police has asked for more men," "police has kept 6 reserve

forces ready," (*Dainik Jagaran*, 31 August 2005) were very common, going mostly with the police version of the incident. Even after such police versions were found to be false, the media continued to rely on the police as the primary source of the conflict.

The print media failed to observe the socio-economic changes as one of the reasons for the growing tension between the communities.

Going by the National Crime Records Bureau figures, the consistent increase of caste conflicts in Haryana is in direct correlation to the changes in socioeconomic reality. According to the 2001 census, the Dalit population in Haryana is 40.9 lakh, which constitutes 19.3 per cent of the total population of the state. No less than 78 percent of Dalits reside in villages.

Census data shows significant changes in the occupational structure of Dalits from 1991 to 2001. First is the rise in the proportion of marginal workers in the total workforce from 7.5 percent to 34.4 percent; second is the shift from agriculture to non-agriculture, showing less dependency on the Jaat landlords for jobs: the 65-percent figure of workers engaged in agriculture in 1991 reducing to 50 percent in 2001; and third is an increase in the work-participation rate, i.e. the proportion of working Dalits in the total Dalit population, from 31 percent to 38 percent over this period. Taking these figures together, it can be said that the Dalit community in Haryana has substantially moved out of agriculture (where they were mostly agricultural labourers) and increased their work participation elsewhere. Such a change in a traditional agrarian society like Gohana had two effects. First, the Jaat community, who employed the Dalits in the field, fell short of labour. The Dalit workforce, who migrated from rural Haryana to its industrial townships, invariably became an industrial workforce, and acquainted themselves with the changing lifestyle and consumer goods. The complaint, as quoted in the *Frontline* report of the Balmikis having televisions, refrigerators and music systems, etc., stem from such changes in social and economic relations. The Dalit community's upward mobility flared up emotions, and conflicts became very frequent in Haryana.

Also, Dalit groups are getting more organised than ever before. Bhagwan Balmiki Sabha is one such organisation in Gohana. Their popular leader, Lara, a 30-year-old resident of the Valmiki colony, led the community in the 2001 agitation against land grabbers to the agita-

tions after the torching of Valmiki Colony in 2005. The Jaat community's anger against Lara increased over the years. And on the second-year anniversary of the murder of the Jaat youth Baljeet Sivatch, on 27 August 2007, Lara was shot to death by a group of Jaat youth. This was covered in *The Indian Express*, with a Gohana dateline on 29 August 2007, and titled "Dalit's killing sparks off violence in Gohana." However, there was no mention of how Lara was the rising leader of the community, and that he was the face of the Valmikis standing up for their rights and against land grab and exploitation was absent in the reporting. "Dalit's killing"/ "violence" etc., were repeated, impersonalising the person and the issue, and the source for the report again remained that of the police and the approach was that of a law-and-order issue.

The context of the Gohana conflict and a sense of history of caste conflicts in Haryana in general were absent in national media coverage. Also missing in the coverage was the discussion of any possible correlation of such caste violence to the policy debates at the national level, like the one on the affirmative action of the marginalised, which most of the Indian print media oppose. Journalist P Sainath raised this question[22]:

> *Oddly, whether it's Gohana, or Jhajar before it, discussion on these issues seldom links up to those other, ongoing debates. For instance, that on reservation. No link is seen between any of this and the debates on social justice. On present SC / ST quotas. Or on the call for quotas in the private sector. Gohana actually has people who gained, if modestly, from reservation.*
>
> *Against huge odds, Gohana's Balmikis snapped their chains. They educated their children. This is not easy. In schools, their boys and girls face the taunts of 'upper' caste peers. (Across the country, large numbers of Dalit pupils drop out of school to escape such humiliation.) First, society places them under inhuman handicaps. Then we demand a "level playing field" against them in jobs and education.*

CONCLUSION

Both the quantitative and qualitative analyses show: a), the newspapers

gave very little editorial space for the conflict and did not publish any on-the-ground reporting from Gohana, even though this town is only 80 kilometres away from the headquarters of *The Indian Express* newspaper, where a couple of hundred journalists work; b), of the news it carried on Gohana, all the sources were invariably from the police and other government agencies; c), whatever coverage the conflict received, there was no attempt to see the context of the conflict and relate it to the larger debates on caste, affirmative action etc. and d), the buildup of the conflict was completely ignored, and violence had to occur for the conflict to attract media attention.

The chapter also demonstrates the rather inevitable caste prejudices and discrimination stretching to the institution of media in portraying a fair representation of the caste conflict. When caste plays out in the society as social imperialism, maintained by religious and cultural sanction, such a system stretches beyond the boundaries of villages and urban settlements of communities, and even influences the choices of the editors and reporters. The conflicts that arise as a result of social segregations and divisions, as seen with the Gohana conflict, periodically surface in contemporary India, and often get very little attention. While the caste system is not shaken in modern Indian communities and continues to act as an important social segregator, and the media conveniently ignores the coverage on caste violence compared to inane controversies from Bollywood and cricket (Chart 4 H), it creates a false public consciousness that modern social life in India is caste-free.

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COVERAGE IN THE INDIAN EXPRESS OF CASTE VIOLENCE IN SAHARANPUR

/ Jaiveer Kohli Mariwala

ABSTRACT

This report studies the coverage, by The Indian Express, *of caste violence in Uttar Pradesh in April and May 2017. Issues of the newspaper were studied, beginning 15 days prior to the first incident of violence on 5 May, and 15 days after the second incident on 23 May. The dates covered are between 20 April and 7 June—a total of 49 days. The case study makes various observations, using qualitative and quantitative methods. For instance, it observes that coverage increases from the first minor clash on 21 April until the first incident of major violence on 6 May. After that, interest in the story was low, until a spike in late May because of protests that occurred in New Delhi, and another surge in interest occurred after the second incident of violence.*

In the initial phase, the largest number of stories were filed from Lucknow and not Saharanpur, raising the question

of how much ground reporting was undertaken. The single-largest contributor to the news area was law enforcement. Given the ubiquity of violence, and that in many of these cases the reporting is based on police comments and documents rather than interviews with villagers, this should come as no surprise. Wider context was also often missing from stories. The coverage on 8 May, for instance, restricts itself largely to the criminal nature of the incidents, and presents the violence in Shabbirpur as a single, decontextualised incident arising from a policing failure. It details why the police allowed the violence to take place and why they were unable to confront the rioting Thakurs, due to a lack of numbers, but does not mention why the police failed to get reinforcements. The last day of coverage analysed—7 June—saw the first op-ed on the story, which finally addressed the question of Dalit assertion and very plainly discusses the historic domination by upper castes in the region. This came weeks after the violence. The primary failure of the reporting overall, this study concludes, is its inability to contextualise the incidents within the framework of caste-conflict in the district, the state or even India in general.

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CASE STUDY

The violence originated in the village of Shabbirpur, in Saharanpur, the northernmost district of Uttar Pradesh. The district, with a population of around three and a half million—of which 20 percent are from Scheduled Caste communities—has a long history of communal tension and of caste violence, instances of which have been rising in recent years. This rise can be explained by two separate phenomena, one of which is common around India, while the other is particular to UP.

Since Independence, the combination of factors such as "consciousness raising… growth of literacy, and the modernization process" have served to empower lower-caste communities to occupy positions in the Indian economy and society that were traditionally reserved for upper-caste communities. The latter tend to want to hold on to their historical position of privilege, and are unwilling to give up their role as "rulers," thereby providing the basis for conflict between these groups. Additionally, in Uttar Pradesh, the appointment of Ajay Mohan Bisht, known as Yogi Adityanath—a member of the Thakur caste, the landed upper caste—has also coincided with a rise of incidents of communal and caste violence in the state. The post of chief minister has been held for years by either members of the Bahujan Samaj Party or the Samajwadi Party, organisations that have traditionally championed the social rights of Dalits and Other Backward Classes. Adityanath's appointment sees a return of the power held by upper castes in the highest post in the state, potentially emboldening Thakurs to "act[s] of reasserting hitherto suppressed caste pride and authority in society."

On 14 April 2017, Dalit villagers in Shabbirpur were denied permission by local authorities to carry out a procession to install a statue of BR Ambedkar at their local temple. Following this, a procession led by a BJP MP, Raghav Lakhanpal, to celebrate Ambedkar Jayanti was carried out on 20 April, during which some violence and damage to police property occurred. Villagers and local SC activists denied that they were involved in the procession.

Subsequently, on 5 May, Thakurs from the neighbouring village carried out a procession to celebrate the birth anniversary of the Rajput king Maharana Pratap. As they were passing through Shabbirpur, a conflict arose after Dalit villagers complained about the noise and ob-

jected to the Thakurs receiving permission for their own procession. In the ensuing scuffle, a Thakur was suffocated to death and rumours spread that he had been killed by Dalits. Thakurs then poured in from the surrounding villages and burnt down over twenty Dalit homes. Scores of villagers were injured.

In the following weeks, protests were organised in Saharanpur by the Bhim Army, an Ambedkarite and Dalit-rights organisation led by the lawyer Chandreshekhar Azad Ravan. One such protest, on 10 May, was attended by over a thousand Dalits, during which property-damage occurred and many were injured in scuffles with the police. Around two weeks later, mass protests were also held against anti-Dalit violence, in Jantar Mantar in New Delhi, with several Dalit unions joining the Bhim Army at the events. On 23 May, a Dalit was killed in Shabbirpur by Thakurs when returning from a rally held by Mayawati that addressed the violence that had just occurred in the area. In the ensuing conflict in the days after, many were injured, and one Thakur youth was shot at but survived. This paper will examine the coverage of the aforementioned deaths, using quantitative and qualitative analyses. It will also cover protests by the Bhim Army and Chandrashekar Azad at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi that occurred between the two aforementioned incidents and were spurred on by the violence in Saharanpur.

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

For this study, issues of *The Indian Express* were studied, beginning 15 days prior to the first incident on 5 May, and 15 days after the second incident of violence on 23 May. The dates covered are between 20 April and 7 June, a total of 49 days. Stories on, or related to, the caste-conflict in Saharanpur were found in 21 of the 49 issues studied. In the graphs below, the "Total News Area" refers not to all 49 issues, but only the 21 issues that contain stories related to the caste conflict in Saharanpur. The total news space studied was 7,88,507cm^2. This includes photographs that were included in any stories related to the incidents in Saharanpur or the protests in New Delhi.

A note to flag issues and clarify measurements:

1. For this study, digital PDF versions of the Delhi edition of

The Indian Express were used.

2. Additionally, while a standard paper-edition of *The Indian Express* measures approximately 55 by 34.5 centimetres, the digital edition, as measured on the research computer, is approximately 83 by 54 centimetres. Thus, when measuring stories in cm^2, the ratio between these two measures was used in order to convert the digital stories into what would have been their actual paper size.
3. Finally, the digital edition did not include any full page, pull outs or add-on advertisements unless they were *The Indian Express* advertorial features, and hence the proportion of ads in the charts below may not represent the actual figures entirely.

The news area under study:

In charts 1 and 2, the total news area, of which proportions are represented, is about 788507 cm^2.

Stories related to the caste conflict in Saharanpur occupied about 8761 cm^2, or 1.1 percent, of the total news area being studied.

It should be noted here that that the news area measured does not include any *The Indian Express* features, such as "Explainers," which are not news-related, and nor does it include the puzzle and comics section.

Chart 1: Distribution of Sahranpur Story in News Area

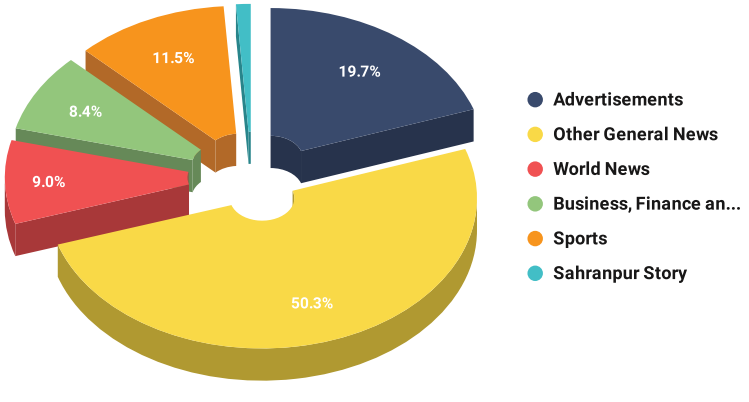


Chart 2: Distribution of Saharanpur News by kind of story

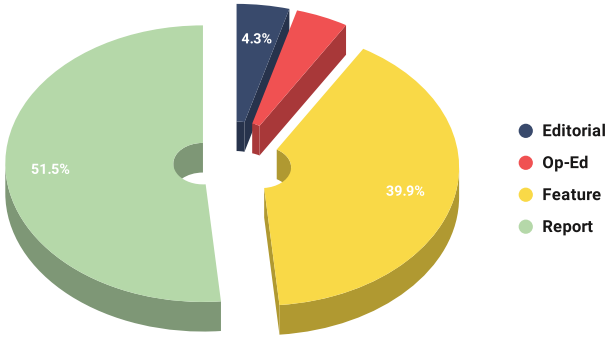
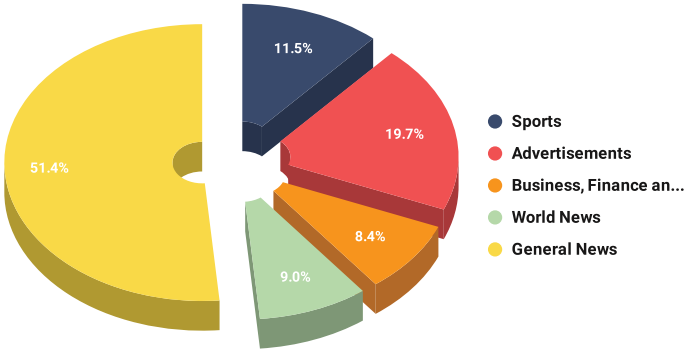


Chart 3: Distribution of Total Area in Content Analyzed



In Chart 3 above, features refer to news stories that move beyond reporting just the basic facts, figures and quotes from authorities. These stories usually included additional reporting on some human element in the story or involved cross-sectional reporting of the incident and its political, cultural or caste-related context. Of the 8,671 cm of news-related to the Sahranpur violence, only about nine percent was in Op-Eds or editorials from *The Indian Express* editorial boards. In terms of the number of stories, this translates to only two editorials and one Op-Ed, at least in the Delhi edition.

Of the two editorials, the first was published on 23 May, and referred to the protests that occurred in Jantar Mantar. The second was published on 26 May, after the second instance of violence in Saharanpur; it called for Adityanath to address the "communal" situation in

the district. Both editorials were only published after the protests had moved the centre of the story from Saharanpur to Delhi, the city from where *The Indian Express* is published. Similarly, only one Op-Ed on the issue was published in the Delhi edition of *The Indian Express*, on "Dalit Assertion," on 7 June.

Points of View

The figures of news areas in all charts in the following subsection are given in cm^2.

The points of view of the following figures are represented in the Saharanpur stories:

- Law Enforcement: *This primarily refers to police officers of varying ranks, in both Delhi and UP*
- Bureaucrats: *Local IAS officers and other bureaucrats in UP*
- BJP leaders and workers: *This includes BJP leaders in UP, where they controlled (and still control) the state government at the time, and in Delhi.*
- UP CM: *Yogi Adityanath's contribution to the story is counted separately*
- CPI(M) Leaders
- Congress Party Leaders: *This includes opposition leaders in both UP and Delhi*
- Rahul Gandhi: *Counted separately from Congress leaders above*
- Akhilesh Yadav: *Counted separately from Samajwadi leaders*
- Samajwadi Party Leaders
- Mayawati: *Counted separately from BSP Leaders*
- BSP Party Leaders
- Jignesh Mevani
- Chandrashekhar Azad: *Counted separately from other Bhim Army leaders*
- Bhim Army Leaders
- Dalit villagers *involved in the clashes*
- Thakur villagers *involved in the clashes*
- The Supreme Court

- Others: *This includes other journalists, UP judiciary members, doctors, unnamed sources and other unaffiliated sources*

Chart 4: Points of view represented (Part 1)

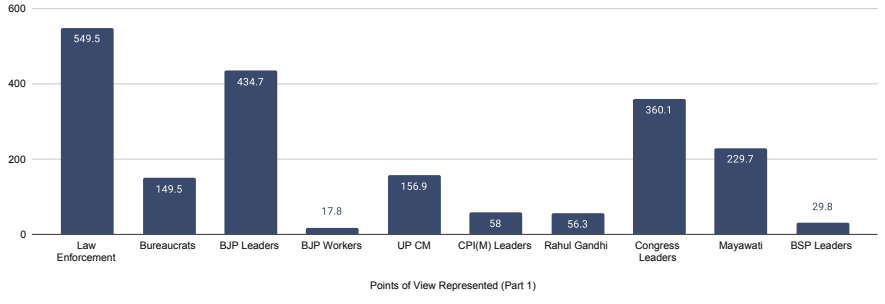
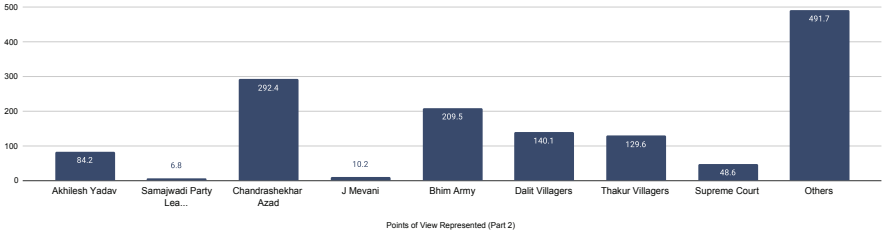


Chart 4b: Points of view represented (Part 2)



It is revealing that the single largest contributor (comprising about 549cm^2 or 15 percent of the total points of view represented) to the news area was law-enforcement individuals. Given the number of instances of violence, and that in many of these cases the stories used reporting based on police comments and documents rather than interviews with villagers, this should come as no surprise. In fact, comments from Dalit and Thakur villagers actually involved in the clashes in Saharanpur, combined together, only amount to about 8 percent of all the points of view represented. For a comparison of the villagers' views with total law enforcement and political views, see Chart 6 below.

Though the BJP is by far the single largest party contributor to the chart above, this should also come as no surprise, given that a BJP MLA was himself involved in the initial clashes in April, and that the BJP government ruled both the state of UP and the national government at the time and hence would be expected to provide a comment. The comments from opposition parties, such as the Congress, the BSP and

Bhim Army, are also substantial (see Chart 5 below), but what should be noted here is how late into the progression of the story some of these parties provided their first point of view:

- BJP: *BJP leaders and workers provide comments as early as 24 April, after a first clash between Dalits and Thakurs in the week prior (but prior to the two main incidences of violence)*
- Bhim Army: *Chandrashekhar Azad gets first involved in the story only on 11 May*
- Congress and CPI(M): *The comments of the Congress and CPI(M) leaders do not appear until until 23 May, after the protests at Jantar Mantar*
- BSP: *The BSP makes its first comment in the story, through Mayawati, on 24 May*
- Samajwadi Party: *Akhilesh Yadav makes a comment on 27 April on the initial clashes, but he and the Samajwadi party barely receive any coverage in the story afterward.*

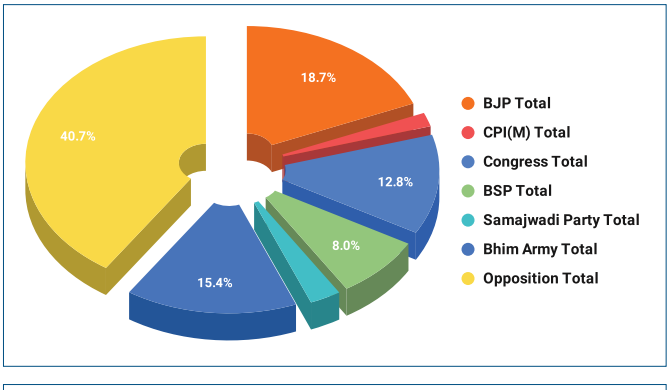


Chart 5: Points of view by party total

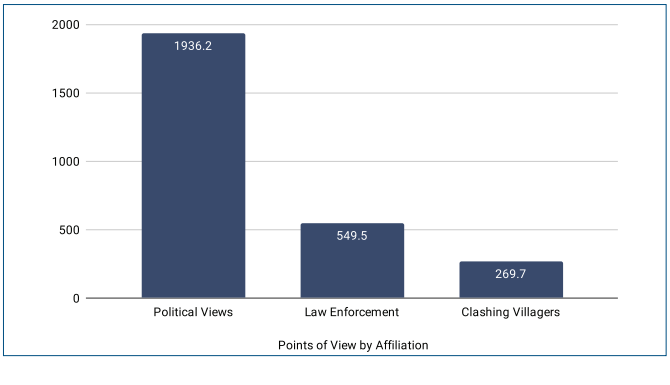


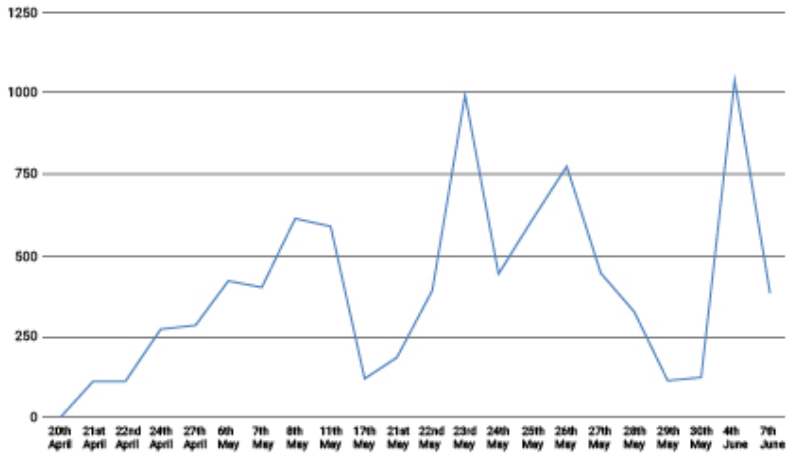
Chart 6: Points of view by Affiliation

Progression, Dateline & Message Charts

Chart 7 below measures the amount of coverage the story received on each of the 21 days a related story appeared in *The Indian Express* (20 April is included even though there was no coverage, as it is the "first" day, 15 days prior to the first main incidence of violence).

There are some points of interest to note here. Coverage steadily increases from the first minor clash on 21 April through till the first incident of major violence covered on 6 May. After that, however, interest in the story is particularly low, until the large spike that occurs from 21 to 23 May. This spike is due to the protests at Jantar Mantar, covered in the issue on 23 May. In this issue, there was a report on the CPM, an interview with K Raju on Dalits' rights and assertion, an editorial from *The Indian Express* and a report in which the BJP blamed the Jantar Mantar protests on political rivals.

Chart 7: Coverage Progression (For Each Day Covered)



After this there is another increase, after the second main incident of violence and in its aftermath, from 24 to 26 May. Interest in the story dips afterward until 4 June, however, until a Sunday story appeared on the Bhim Army, accompanied by a large photograph. Finally, on 7 June, there is a short Op-Ed on Dalit assertion, in the context of the violence in Saharanpur and the protests in Delhi. The largest number

of stories were filed from Lucknow, and Delhi and not Saharanpur, as show in Chart 8, raising the question of how much ground reporting was carried out during some of the initial incidents of violence. The large proportion of stories filed from Delhi are due to the protests that occurred in Jantar Mantar, and their political and editorial aftermath.

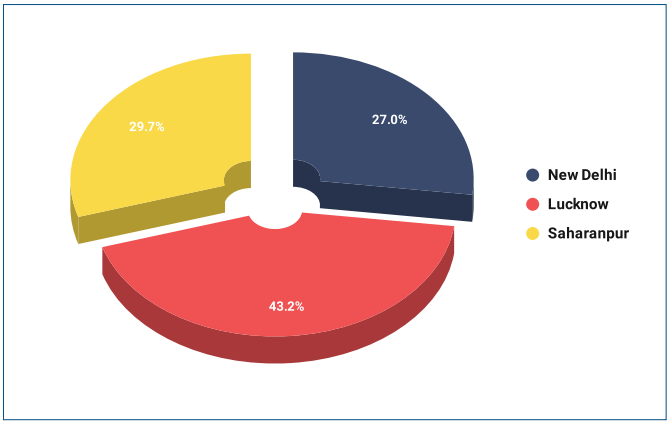


Chart 8: Dateline Chart

For the message chart, in Chart 9, each story was assigned a value of 1 under a column detailing which of the four categories it primarily belonged to: Caste Conflict; Law and Order (which dealt primarily with the actual crimes being committed rather than with caste, and involved comments from law enforcement individuals); Political Issue (in which the majority of the coverage was on the political fallouts arising from the incidents); or Mixed/No Message (in which messaging was mixed or did not fit into any particular category). These values were then totalled, and the proportion of each kind of story is presented in the chart below.

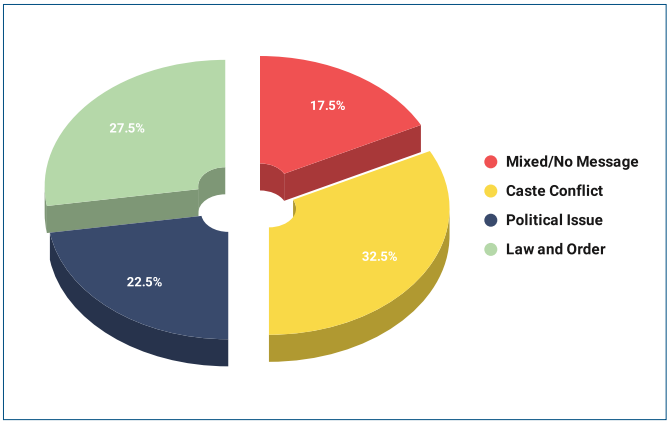


Chart 9: Message Chart

QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS

Pre-incidents: 21 April – 27 April

The first mention of any incident in this episode of caste-conflict was in the 21 April edition of *The Indian Express*. The article, titled "Clash over Ambedkar procession in UP village," is a short wire-report from Lucknow, tucked away on the tenth page. The article mentions "communal tensions," and that Dalit villagers clashed when they were taking a "shobha yatra" to commemorate BR Ambedkar, but does little else to address the question of caste-conflict in Shabbirpur. The most space in the article is given to quotes from the senior superintendent of police, who comments on the clashes, as well as to information on the arrest of Raghav Lakhanpal, the BJP MP from Saharanpur. The article details how the MP was part of the crowd that ransacked the SSP's camp office.

Of particular note is how the article details the participants in the clash. According to the article, Dalits clashed with "other members of the community" because "members from the other community" objected to the yatra. There are no specifics on who comprises this other community, nor are there any quotes from any Dalit members of the procession. This elision of the caste element in the story in order to emphasise the political and criminal nature of the events expands into the rest of the articles in this first portion of the coverage. The wire article makes no mention of either the word "caste" or even "Dalit," but instead simply says that "two communities clashed."

The 24 April edition contains a much larger report from an *The Indian Express* reporter with a Saharanpur byline. It mentions that Dalit villagers sought permission for the yatra on 14 April, on the birth anniversary of Ambedkar, a significant day for the community, and were denied, and that they then clashed with Muslim villagers who threw stones at the procession. One Dalit villager, named and mentioned in the article, alleges that the procession was in fact organised by outsiders, given that they—that is, the villagers—did not receive permission. Primary space in the coverage is given to the rather confusing involvement of BJP leaders in the procession. The police allege that the events were organised by "one Ashok Bharti [who] was earlier associated with

the BSP and had recently moved to BJP." The MLA from the region, Rajeev Gumber, then claims that neither he nor Raghav Lakhanpal had any involvement with the organisation of the procession, that Lakhanpal was just a bystander and that Bharti was not associated with the BJP.

These incidents are mentioned at length here because these allegations from the villagers, claiming that the events were organised by outsiders as well as the involvement of the BJP leaders, are never addressed in subsequent coverage of the incidents. Reporting in other papers on the incidents also includes comments from other local SC activists and leaders from the SP, who claim that the procession was simply a cynical attempt to gather Dalit support by the BJP. None of the future coverage from *The Indian Express* addresses either this aspect of the story or how these events may have contributed to the violence that later unfurled.

The coverage on 27 April comprises separate wire articles that deal primarily with the political consequences of the incidents—the SSP from the region being transferred; Akhilesh Yadav demanding a judicial probe into the incidents and the involvement of the BJP; and Lakhanpal meeting with the UP CM to "make his case."

In this first part of the coverage, caste tension is represented as a kind of accoutrement to the main events rather than the primary instigator and cause of the conflict itself. That most of the reporting is wire reporting from Lucknow—as opposed to from Saharanpur—means that sources that make up the content of the story are more likely to be sources that can be reached easily over the phone, i.e. policemen and officials. The word "Thakur" is not mentioned, nor is the "history of communal tension" in the village ever examined or addressed. There is no more coverage on the incidents in Saharanpur until 6 May, when violence flares up, even though there are several articles with Lucknow bylines in the intervening period, including one with the headline "BJP MP threatens to 'skin alive' UP police officer."

First Instance of Violence and Aftermath: 6 May – 17 May

When the story reappears in *The Indian Express*, it is immediately pushed to the front cover, and appears on the cover on four out of six days in which it is covered, between 6 May and 17 May. The parties involved in the conflict remain the same. What changed, however, and

what determined the change in priority, is the mass violence and the death of one of the villagers involved.

The choice of headline, "Thakurs vs. Dalits in Saharanpur," belies the incidents that occurred. After a group of Dalit villagers stopped the procession celebrating Maharana Pratap from entering their village, a fight broke out, in which one Thakur youth died of suffocation, hundreds were injured, and over twenty homes were burnt, all of which belonged to Dalit villagers. While the headline may have made the conflict seem like a fight between groups of equal strength, allegedly as many as one thousand Thakurs were involved in burning the homes, outnumbering even the police. The article also fails to mention that Thakurs comprise 60 percent of the population of Shabbirpur and its neighbouring villages. With a Lucknow dateline, the article does not interview any of the villagers involved, even as *The Indian Express* devotes an entire article, on Page 7, to Yogi Adityanath's statements on the earlier incidents in Saharanpur.

The coverage on the following two days sees *The Indian Express* send a reporter, Abhishek Angad, to cover the story on the ground. Despite the story being a feature, it neither addresses the history of communal violence in Saharanpur district, nor the rampant anti-Dalit violence in UP. The 7 May issue covers the aftermath of the first instance of violence and includes interviews with Dalit villagers whose homes were burnt. The story addresses the fact that the death of Sumit Kumar may have been accidental given that he suffocated, and mentions that a rumour that he was killed by Jaatavs, a Dalit sub-caste, which may have sparked the violence.

The coverage on 8 May, however, restricts itself largely to the criminal nature of the incidents, and presents the violence in Shabbirpur as a single, decontextualised incident arising from a policing failure. The cover story details why the police allowed the violence to take place and why they were unable to confront the rioting Thakurs, due to a lack of numbers. But the story does not talk about why the police failed to get reinforcements, especially when reserve riot police are located in each region, and particularly since there was already tension. The story also does not look into possible failures in intelligence on the part of police, which affected its level of preparation. Another story on the seventh page details the FIRs that were filed in the police cases following the violence, alongside a short interview with the parents of Sumit Kumar.

The latter story includes a comment from Shiv Kumar, Sumit's cousin, who states that their village has "no history of Dalit-Thakur rivally."

The "Bheem Army" receives its first mention in the 10 May edition. It is described in the headlines as a "Mob [that] targets police." The article does not interview any leadership from the Bhim Army, except for one person named Rahul Bharti; however, his relationship to the organisation is not explained beyond the description that he "mobilised the crowd."

This trend of not providing sufficient context continues on 11 and 17 May, albeit there is one feature interview with Chandrashekhar Azad. Yet, the article consists largely of quotes from Azad, and does little to address or comment on his statements on the plight of Dalits in Saharanpur and UP in general, or the necessity of the existence of an organisation such as the Bhim Army. The two other articles cover the transfers of police officials from the region and calls from the opposition to investigate the two BJP leaders involved in the incidents in April.

The primary failure of this section is its inability to contextualise the incidents within the framework of caste-conflict in the district, the state or even India in general. This failure is epitomised in the interview with Azad, in which he notes the unwillingness of the Indian police to address the problems of Dalits and their tendency to favour upper castes—a tendency that has been proved to be historically true—and how this necessitates interventions of the kind conducted by the Bhim Army. Despite this, *The Indian Express* fails to provide any comment on the matter and leaves it all to him. There are no Op-eds or editorials addressing the violence in this period.

Delhi Protests and Second Instance of Violence: May 21 - May 27

The article in the 21 May edition of *The Indian Express*, titled "Dalit groups plan agitation in city today," marks a shift in the coverage of the story. Unlike the articles mentioned previously, it is under the "City" section, with a "New Delhi" dateline. As detailed in the progression chart above, the coverage of the story spikes after and around the agitation in the Delhi. It briefly mentions the incidents in Saharanpur that

sparked the protests, and the coverage in the 22 May edition includes extensive quotes from Azad's speech at the protests at Jantar Mantar, as well as a short article on two other attendees of the protests, and in the latter there is some addressing of the plight of Dalits facing Thakur violence in UP.

On 23 May, *The Indian Express* includes on its sixth page a large section that comprises three separate articles on the political importance of the protests at Jantar Mantar. Alongside a long interview with K Raju, the head of the Congress SC cell, there is a short interview with representatives of the CPI(M) and a large article with responses to the protests from BJP leaders in Delhi. The interview with Raju includes the first time thus far that statements from anyone (apart from Azad) on the trend of Dalit assertion, as well as how the violence is a threatened response to this assertion. The article with the Communist Party has quotes from leaders who claim that the Dalit protests were in response to growing "saffron terror" in India. Finally, the extensive article interviewing the BJP leaders includes several statements disparaging the Bhim Army, calling it a "socially regressive movement" and implying that "Christian missionaries" have some role to play in the agitation, before alleging that larger, national opposition parties were, in fact, behind the protests. In addition to the fact that the largest space on the page is given to these "theories" by BJP leaders, none of the three stories directly address the caste violence in Saharanpur. As the story moves away from Saharanpur and towards the so-called centre, so too the coverage shifts its lens and it is turned into a more political story.

In addressing the second instance of violence on 23 May, *The Indian Express* coverage on 24 May and the uninterrupted coverage from 27-28 May improves on that of the previous incident. The ground coverage includes three different reporters, Saharanpur datelines and quotes from Dalit villagers attacked in the violence. At the same time, however, large amounts of article space are given to statements from Adityanath, in which he claims that the UP government has "gotten to the root of the issue." Yet, the articles refrain from addressing the history of increased caste-related violence under Adityanath's government, or even in the state prior to his tenure. As shown in the quantitative section above, the space in the coverage given to Mayawati is minimal, and a short article with some quotes from her speech is her only coverage in the entire period analysed.

In addition, as is briefly mentioned in the quantitative analysis, although the period analysed in this section includes two editorials by *The Indian Express*, they only appear once the Bhim Army attracted the attention of the Delhi public, evidently deeming the events in Saharanpur significant enough to be addressed in the paper's editorial section. In the intervening period between the first and second incidents of violence there are no editorials on Saharanpur.

The second editorial begins with a congratulation to the UP government for dismissing the district magistrate and police officers for failing to control the violence, and ends with the articulation of the hope that the Adityanath-led government will be "even-handed in its conduct and win the trust of all communities." The editorial focusses on the law-and-order nature of the problem, rather than addressing the dominance and oppression of lower castes by Thakurs in UP. The hopeful and almost naive tone of the editorial appears ignorant of the fact that Adityanath himself is not shy of making casteist statements in public, and that the brazen behaviour of Thakurs in the state may be a direct consequence of the leadership of Aditynath, a Thakur himself.

Final Coverage and Aftermath: 28 May to 7 June

Coverage dies down during this period. Articles from 28-30 May deal largely with Rahul Gandhi's visit to the area (the first time he really finds coverage in the story); the political fallout in the Congress Party as a result; and a story on a few RSS and BJP leaders visiting the area to broker peace with Thakurs. The Bhim Army and the villagers sides are not addressed in this section of the coverage.

Both the Bhim Army and the story itself disappear until the 4 June *Sunday Express* edition. There is a large, full-page spread that addresses the existence of the Bhim Army and its necessity to the Dalit community of Uttar Pradesh, and even the emboldening of Thakurs under Adityanath's leadership. The last day of coverage analysed, 7 June, includes the first Op-ed on the story. Written by Bhalachandra Mungekar, an Ambedkarite and economist, the article finally addresses the question of Dalit assertion and very plainly discusses the historic domination by upper castes in the so-called "cow-belt" of India. This article comes weeks after the violence.

CONCLUSION

While *The Indian Express* covered the conflict over several days, most of the coverage comprised reports on violence and protest, or statements by police and politicians. The larger context of caste violence and the histories of such caste-based violence—especially in the region of Saharanpur— are both missing from the coverage. The episodes of violence are presented largely as law-and-order stories, which perhaps explains why the highest proportion of coverage is dedicated to statements by law-enforcement agencies.

On-the-ground coverage was also negligible, with a high proportion of stories filed from Lucknow and Delhi and thin coverage from Saharanpur. Towards the end of the period covered in this study, the nature of the reportage gradually changes its focus from reporting on violence to political statements and fights between political parties. These statements are far easier to report on as they are made from cities and political offices, and they are also devoid of any complexity. The villagers and participants of the actual incidents eventually get negligible coverage compared to the politicians and law enforcements from the urban centres, and any examination of the caste-based context is soon absent from the reporting.

A STUDY OF AJIT'S REPORTING ON THE WOMEN'S STRIKE AGAINST MICROFINANCE INSTITUTIONS IN PUNJAB

/ Srishti Jaswal

ABSTRACT

This case study analyses media reporting on women's issues concerning the financial disenfranchisement of women in Punjab. Women, mostly Dalits, organised protest marches and rallies against the MFIs (Microfinance Institution), alleging exploitation in hundreds of villages in the Malwa region of Punjab, between May and December 2020. In Punjab, needy urban and rural women are frequently given loans without any collateral, in groups comprising around twenty people each, around twenty women each by various MFIs.

Often the loan, which is spent on everyday household expenses, is difficult for women to repay. Since the loan is given without collateral, the interest rates are as high as 30 percent. The companies claim to "solve" the issue of non-repayment of loans by giving a new and bigger loan, but by first cutting the previous amount owed by the women.

But in 2020, a lockdown was imposed because of the COVID-19 pandemic and these women's capacity to repay the loans collapsed. However, the pressure on them to repay the loans increased.. Tired and agitated, they started protesting. The women initially demanded that installment repayments for the lockdown period should be waived. But as the struggle progressed, the demands included complete

loan waivers, Rs 10,000 to be provided as a monthly relief amount for all poor families during the lockdown period, interest-free loans and the banning of harassment by microfinance companies.

The study analyses media reporting on the protests, using both quantitative and qualitative research techniques. The quantitative analysis focusses on a particular Punjabi newspaper, Ajit. *It examines four district editions—Patiala, Barnala, Sangrur and Bhatinda—of the paper, for one month each. The qualitative analysis deploys exhaustive sources, including videos, photographs, notices, pamphlets and interviews to examine the nature of the coverage. Only a handful of rallies was given coverage in the district pages of newspapers, effectively disregarding the fact that the agitation was taking place in most districts of Punjab. Although these protests were led by women, hardly any women leaders or protestors were given coverage. Factors such as urgency, relevance and context were often missing from the little coverage that was undertaken, and the interests of women protesting against the MFI were given negligible space, which makes it nearly impossible for microfinance stakeholders to become aware of the women's protest. This study concludes, therefore, that the media coverage of the women's agitation against the microfinance companies was deeply inadequate and hyper-local.*

SRISHTI JASWAL is an award-winning journalist based in India after stints in France, Germany and USA. Her reporting has been supported by Pulitzer Center, International Center for Journalists and National Foundation for India. She has been a Digital Witness fellow with Princeton University's Center for Information Technology Policy and an Ochberg Fellow with Columbia University's Dart Center for Trauma and Journalism.

YASH MITTAL, a journalist based in Punjab, contributed to this report, as a research assistant, by measuring the surface area of the news clippings as well as translating it from Punjabi to English.

WOMEN AND THE QUESTION OF FINANCIAL INCLUSION

In March 2015, Sri Mulyani Indrawati, the finance minister of Indonesia, wrote these lines for the World Bank's Voices blog: "If women had better access to the financial system - even so much as a basic deposit account at a bank - it would be a major step in the direction of greater wealth and greater economic empowerment."[1] She added that women are at a particular disadvantage when it comes to accessing financial services, and that improved "access to the financial system can reduce income inequality, boost job creation and make people less vulnerable to unexpected losses of income. People who are "unbanked" find it harder to save, plan for the future, start a business or recover from a crisis."

The World Bank defines financial inclusion as "access to useful and affordable financial products and services" that meet individuals' and businesses' needs.[2] These include "transactions, payments, savings, credit and insurance – delivered in a responsible and sustainable way." Meanwhile, the Reserve Bank of India committee on financial inclusion defines it as "the process of ensuring access to financial services and timely and adequate credit where needed by vulnerable groups such as weaker sections and low-income groups at an affordable cost."[3] The RBI committee on financial sector reforms, however, defines financial inclusion as "universal access to a wide range of financial services at a reasonable cost."[4] These include "not only banking products but also other financial services, such as insurance and equity products." In a speech, P Vijaya Bhaskar, a former executive director of the RBI, in 2013, stated that "financial inclusion broadens the resource base of the financial system by developing a culture of savings among large segment of rural population and plays its own role in the process of economic development."[5] He added that "by bringing low income groups within the perimeter of the formal banking sector; financial inclusion protects their financial wealth and other resources in exigent circumstances." According to Bhaskar, it also "mitigates the exploitation of vulnerable sections by the usurious money lenders by facilitating easy access to formal credit."

The fact remains though, that, according to the World Bank, nearly one-third of the world's adults—around 1.7 billion people—are still

unbanked (it cites the Global Findex 2021 database for this estimation).[6 7] About half of these unbanked people "included women in poor households in rural areas."[8] The Findex database further elaborates that "roughly one out of two bank accounts in India remain inactive, which is about twice the average of other developing economies. In an article titled "The missing women in finance," states, "What is worse is the notable gender gap in these inactive accounts—54 % of women account holders report not using their account, as opposed to 43 % of male account holders."[9] Such a scenario, then, emphasises what the economist Amartya Sen has posited before, that poverty does not involve only lowness of income, but also deprivation of basic capabilities.[10]

MICROFINANCE INSTITUTES AND THE FINANCIAL INCLUSION OF WOMEN

According to an evaluation of microfinance and financial inclusion posted on the RBI, the "world over, microfinance is looked upon as means of credit-based poverty alleviation and financial inclusion."[11] A bank account provides an entrance to other financial services, but does not automatically translate into the ability to actually use or have access to these.

Microfinancing, introduced in India in the 1980s, was intended to serve as a solution for both poverty and the empowerment of women.[12] (There were around 943 women for every 1000 men in the country, according to the 2011 Census,[13] and microfinance is directed mainly towards women.) The Gujarat-based Self-Employed Women's Association—SEWA—formed the first initiative for microfinance, establishing the SEWA Bank in 1974.[14] According to an article by Dr Kembai Srinivasa Rao, "the basic principles of microfinance that distinguishes it from general credit delivery is its small amount of loan, lack of physical collateral but emphasis on social collateral or peer monitoring and focus on women borrowers offered for informal economic activities that thrives in local geography."[15] With these three factors, according to the RBI, microfinance is expected to combat the main issues often posed by credit delivery programmes designed for the poor—targeting, the screening of borrowers and enforcement of the credit contract.[16] It adds that microfinance began as a consequence of the activity of non-governmental organisations who were assisted by foreign donors for lending operations.[17]

However, as Jhanvi Sonakia writes, since microfinance models tend not to focus on people below the poverty line, who are seen as risky, in order to run the programme and avail of high repayment rates, the scheme operators "select economically stable individuals as the programme beneficiaries … Borrowers are interest-sensitive, so the capacity for borrowing decreases with an increase in interest rates."[18] She adds that interest rates appear not to be regulated well: if the banking sector charges between nine and ten percent as an annual interest rate, MFIs may charge between 11 and 24 percent, though these rates of interest shift according to MFI lending conditions and policies.

THE STATUS OF BORROWING AND THE REPAYMENT OF SMALL LOANS IN THE POST-COVID-19 ECONOMY

The RBI stated that the COVID-19 pandemic could be "the biggest tail risk event in a long time."[19] The disturbances it engendered in the supply-chain as well as business operations, the chances of livelihood loss, and therefore, the fall in household incomes, is high. It added that, given this situation, non-banking finance companies—or NBFC—MFIs, which provide collateral-free loans to low-income groups, are especially vulnerable to credit risks. Repayment rates have fallen, also adding on liquidity risks, and smaller NBFCs-MFIs are at the risk of credit rating downgrades, which may affect their "ability to raise fresh capital and access liquidity."

This is not the first challenge for MFIs. In 2010-11, they were faced with a downturn, reportedly brought on by the malpractices of certain MFIs in Andhra Pradesh. According to Anand Sinha, the recovery rate of 99 percent fell to 10 percent, thereby bringing about major non-performing assets, which severely impacted the functioning of MFIs.[20]

MFIs mostly serve rural and semi-urban areas, where digital infrastructure and internet connectivity are low.[21] In addition, microfinance borrowers tend to have low literacy levels and mostly transact in cash since they are by and large daily-wage earners. MFI operations have tended, therefore, to be cash-intensive.[22] In 2016, after demonetisation, cash-intensive MFIs saw a rise in credit delinquencies, which then was followed by disruptions engendered by state elections and announce-

ments of farm-loan waivers in 2017.[23] Environmental disasters such as the Kerala floods led to further distress.[24]

WOMEN-LED MARCHES IN PUNJAB AGAINST THE MFI

Women, mostly Dalits, organised protest marches and rallies against the MFIs, alleging exploitation in hundreds of villages in the Malwa region of Punjab, between May and December 2020. In Punjab, needy urban and rural women are frequently given loans without any collateral, in groups comprising around twenty people each. The loans start at Rs 15,000 and go up to Rs 1 lakh, and they have to return these in two years, in weekly or fortnightly installments, depending on the MFI's lending scheme. Often, the loan amount gets spent on household purposes, particularly due to poverty and a lack of income, and repayment becomes very difficult. Furthermore, the interest rates are between 20 and 30 percent—so high that repayment is almost impossible for many.

Most of these MFIs cut the first installment from the original loan amount and also collect Rs 1,500-2,000 in the name of file charges. All the women in a group are responsible for timely repayment by each individual woman, failing which the group is blacklisted. This results in a huge amount of social and peer pressure on women who are unable to repay. The companies claim to "solve" the issue of non-repayment of loans by giving a new and bigger loan, but by first cutting the previous amount owed by the women.

On 24 March 2020, Prime Minister Narendra Modi imposed a nationwide lockdown due to COVID-19, which remained in effect until 31 May 2020. Due to this, the income of many poor families reduced to nothing.[25] The Indian economy was predicted to contract by 23.9 percent in the April-June quarter of the 2020 fiscal year—the worst decline recorded since India began compiling GDP statistics in 1996.[26] Given the dwindling economy, therefore, many women failed to repay the installments. However, the field agents of these companies continued going door-to-door for repayments. Women alleged frequent bullying from such agents, which is what led them to organise marches in Punjab. The women initially demanded that installment repayments for the lockdown period should be waived. But as the struggle progressed,

the demands included complete loan waivers, Rs 10,000 to be provided as a monthly relief amount for all poor families during the lockdown period, interest-free loans and the banning of harassment by microfinance companies.

Under pressure from the women's struggle, many district magistrates in Punjab declared, based on an order issued by the RBI, that if any company tries to pressurise women before August 2020 for repayment, a police case will be registered against it. The women-led marches in Punjab therefore qualify as a case of "financial disenfranchisement of women."

QUANTITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS

Reports about the women-led marches were carried in local district pages of the *Ajit* newspaper. Various districts had different and scattered coverage. This part of the quantitative study analyses the content of *Ajit*, for 31 days, between 11 August 2020 and 11 September 2020. Although the women-led marches began in May and continued till December, we chose this period as the maximum rallies and marches were held during it. The Patiala district edition was studied as a base edition, although three more districts—Sangrur, Barnala and Bhatinda—were also studied for analysis.

The Indian Readership Survey states that *Ajit* was the leading Punjabi publication in the period from December 2019 to March 2020. The newspaper had the biggest readership, with over 4.28 million readers, within this time frame.[27]

The following chart shows the distribution of the total area:

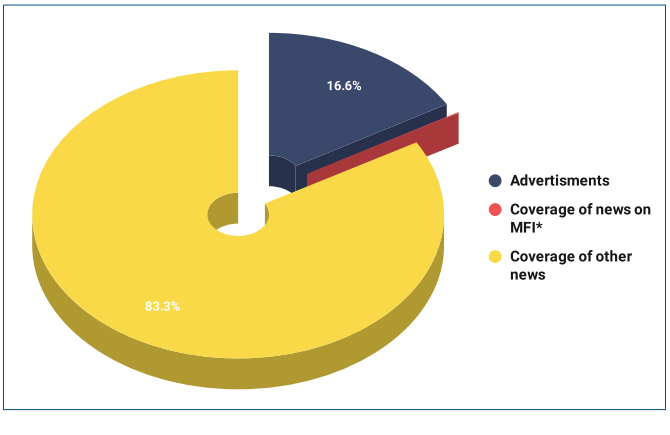
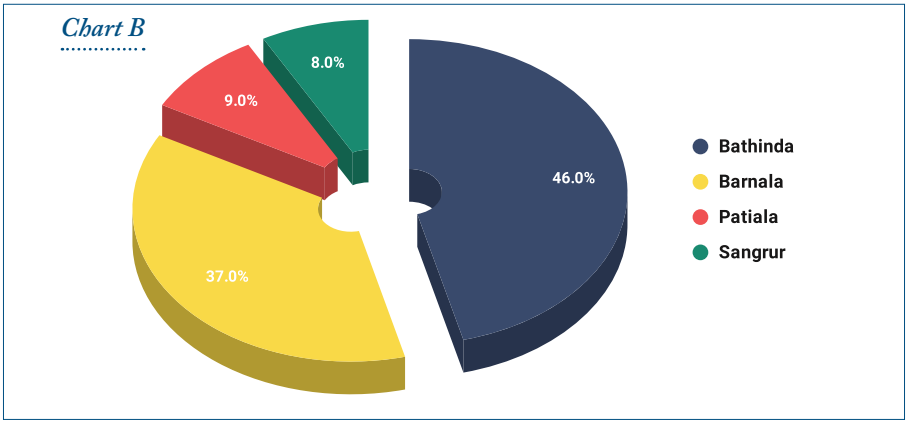


Chart A: Distribution of total area in content analysed[**]

*Number of days analysed: 31 days****
Total area analysed: 43,29,976.56 cm sq
Time period of analysis: August 11, 2020, to September 11, 2020
Total editions analysed: Patiala, Barnala, Bhatinda and Sangrur
**According to coverage in the Patiala edition*
***In cm sq*
****There was no edition on 16 August because it followed Independence Day*

The following chart shows the distribution of the news on the MFI, district edition-wise:



Coverage of women-led marches in Bathinda edition: 4447.72 Cm Sq
Coverage of women-led marches in Barnala edition: 3559.78 Cm Sq
Coverage of women- led marches in Patiala edition: 850.16 Cm Sq
Coverage of women- led marches in Sangrur edition: 789.94 Cm Sq

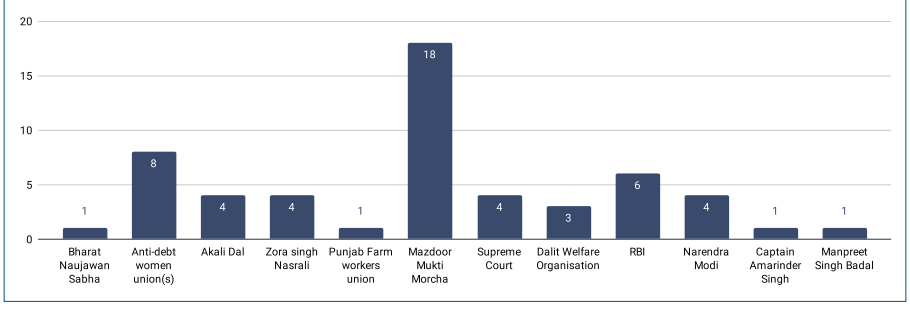
The various figures, organisations and institutions, whose viewpoints regarding the women-led marches were represented in the news were:

- Various anti-debt women's organisations formed in Punjab during this period:
  Karza Virodhi Aurat Sangharsh
  Karza Pidit Aurat Sangharsh Committee
  Aurat Karza Mukt Manch
  Aurat Karza Mukti Sangharsh
  Aurat Karza Mukti Andolan
- Bharat Naujawan Sabha, *a left-wing organisation representing workers and peasant youths.*

- Shiromani Akali Dal, Aam Aadmi Party and other local political parties in Punjab.
- Punjab Khet Mazdoor Union, *representing Punjab's farm workers—mostly covered here through Zora Singh Nasrali, its union state president.*
- Mazdoor Mukti Morcha, *the agri-worker wing of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist).*
- The Supreme Court of India.
- Dalit Welfare Organization, *representing underprivileged groups in Punjab.*
- The Reserve Bank of India.
- The government of India, *represented here mostly through the views of Narendra Modi.*
- Captain Amarinder Singh, *chief minister of Punjab.*
- Manpreet Singh Badal, *finance minister of Punjab.*

The following chart shows the points of views represented in the coverage:

*Chart C: Interest groups represented**



**Number of times quoted in the coverage*

QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS

Regularity of the coverage:

Even though the conflict between women in Punjab and the MFI be-

gan in May, the media coverage around it was sparse and irregular. The content analysis reveals that no attempt was made to understand the progression of the events. Only spot coverage was given to the protests, without understanding the reason behind them. In the area analysed, of 43,29,976.56 cm sq, all of the stories were spot reportage, including 40 news reports from the four editions.

The first meeting of women was held on 13 May 2020, at the house of one aggrieved woman, Krishna Kaur, in the Mansa district. In an interview with me, Kaur explained that, in Punjab, because of the nationwide lockdown to contain COVID-19, many households had a hugely reduced income. Many women came out as a result, alleging harassment by the MFI agents for repayment of the small loans. The installments of these loan repayments were due weekly or fortnightly. Many women had taken multiple small loans from a number of MFIs, because of which multiple repayments were due every week. Krishna herself had taken three loans from three different MFIs. The interest levied was also very high, ranging between 20 and 30 percent. Under the banner of Mazdoor Mukti Morcha, she, along with other leaders, started holding multiple rallies to protest against the harassment to repay these loans. On 25 May 2020, a movement was started by the MMM, in which the leaders went from village to village to make people aware of their cause.

On 5 August 2020 the first major rally was held in the Barnala district, in which, according to the MMM, around 1,000 women had participated. A similar rally was held on 7 August 2020, in Mansa, and on 10 August 2020, in Bathinda. It is pertinent to mention that on 12 August 2020, one of the biggest rallies was held in the Sangrur district, in which over ten thousand women marched. Despite being such a large number, no coverage was to be found on the next day in the Patiala edition of *Ajit*. The distance between Patiala and Sangrur is less than sixty kilometres. There was no mention of the rally in Sangrur, Barnala and Bhatinda editions either. However, some reports on subsequent days mentioned the rallies in other editions.

Similar rallies were later held in Punjab, including in Patiala, Moga, Faridkot and Ferozepur, in the months of August and September 2020. Under MMM the women also held dharnas on the occasion of the Hindu festival of Karva Chauth, in October 2020. The protests continued till December 2020, when these women also sat in front of the houses of various

cabinet ministers in the Congress government, headed at the time by Captain Amarinder Singh in Punjab.

However, the coverage was given to only a handful of rallies in different districts, on an ad-hoc basis. In addition, none of the news articles attempted to map the timeline of the conflict. There were no interviews, no in-depth analysis features, investigative stories, opinion pieces or editorials on the women's anti-debt struggle, affecting thousands of women and their families.

News space provided

Although the women's marches were carried out all over Punjab, the news space for its coverage was provided only by the local pages of *Ajit*, which varied from district to district. The maximum coverage was given in Bathinda, with 4447.72 cm sq space, followed by Barnala district with 3559.78 cm sq and Patiala with 850.16 cm sq. The least amount of coverage was given by the Sangrur edition, with just 789.94 cm sq. In fact, for the Patiala edition, during the 31 days analysed, only one clipping was directly related to women's protests against the MFI. This clipping, published on 1 September 2020, was given just 266.28 cm sq of space on page 7. A translated version of the news report is reproduced here. In this spot reportage, no protester was directly quoted in the news brief.

Women shout slogans against private finance company
Rajpura / Banur, August 31 (Ranjit Singh, Bhupinder Singh)

> *In Khera Gajju village, about 10 km from here, women chanted slogans against private finance companies under the banner of Mazdoor Mukti Morcha Punjab. Giving information in this regard, they said that due to the Corona pandemic in the country and abroad, their operations have been stopped and the daily expenses are being carried out with great difficulty. So they took a loan from a private finance company to meet their domestic needs. They are not in a position to repay the loan due to non-performance. They said that now the owners of the companies were harassing them by coming to their house and threatening to ruin their credit if they did not repay the loan. They also alleged that private companies were charging too much interest. In this case, they are unable to repay the loan. They have demanded the government to forgive their debt. They said that as the Union gov-*

ernment forgives the debts of big companies and their debts should also be forgiven. Pooja, Sunita, Kirna Rani, Mandeep Kaur, Nab Singh, Goldie, Jarnail Singh and other women were present on the occasion.

It is pertinent to mention that Chief Minister Amarinder Singh was an elected representative from Patiala's urban constituency. Also, the decision-making body of various MFIs, called the Microfinance Institutions Network—MFIN—is based outside Punjab, with two registered offices in Gurgaon, Haryana, Hyderabad and Telangana. The protest marches by women were taken out to capture the attention of stakeholders, including the state government and MFIN. However, the likelihood of them being able to grab the attention of stakeholders, after news about them was published on page 7 of the Patiala district edition only once in a period of 31 days, was very slim. In fact, stakeholders were neither interviewed nor quoted even once during the coverage.

In an interview with me, Bhagwant Singh Samao, the leader of MMM, said, "the press releases sent by us were published often by local newspapers without any scrutiny or changes. The newspaper correspondents rarely visited the spot for the coverage. They asked for information either over the phone or through press releases. No effort was put by them to report the issue faced by these women. None of the women were ever interviewed. Only the trimmed press releases were published, that too not always." He added that although the women's march was reported by local media, it never reached the government or other stakeholders. Their demands are still unmet, even after their prolonged agitation, which started in May 2020 and continued till December 2020.

Lack of Perspective, Comparison with other Coverage

The news coverage on the anti-debt women's march could be compared to the reportage covering the death of the actor Sushant Singh Rajput in June 2020. It was given front page coverage by the newspaper on most days. Rajput's family had lodged a complaint against the actor Rhea Chakraborty, Rajput's girlfriend, in July 2020, alleging abetment of suicide, wrongful restraint, wrongful confinement, theft, criminal breach of trust and cheating under various sections of the IPC. In the

Patiala edition, the women's march was given just 850.16 cm sq coverage, in comparison to 2539.83 cm sq coverage provided for the news related to Rajput and Chakraborty, who lived one thousand five hundred kilometres away, in Mumbai. Therefore, the extent of coverage given to it, in sharp contrast to the women-led marches in Punjab itself, goes against the basic news values of social good, impact and proximity that the thousands of protesting women deserved.

Lack of space given to women leaders:

Despite the fact that the protest was about the women and led by the women, there was no space given to women leaders in the coverage. Krishna Kaur, despite being one of the leaders who spearheaded the protests, was mentioned just twice in the total news coverage, and that too only in the Bhatinda edition. News items that mentioned her were published with 399.66 cm sq on 1 September 2020 and merely 93.72 cm sq on 14 August 2020. A section of the translated version of the news published on 1 September 2020 reads:

> ***Women rallied and protested for debt forgiveness***
> **Mansa, August 31 (Gurchet Singh Fattewalia)**
>
> > *Mr. Bhagwant Singh Samao, State President, Mazdoor Mukti Morcha, Punjab; Gulab Khiva, Sukhjit Ramanand of AISA, Sukhcharan Singh Danewalia, District Leader, Punjab Kisan Union, Krishna Kaur Mansa, Raj Rani, Jaswinder Maujia, Bikker Sitara addressed the gathering.*

The clipping here mentions that Kaur and other leaders addressed the gathering. However, it does not mention what they said. Even within this sparse coverage, then, no quote was attributed to Kaur.

Kaur is also mentioned in the following news clip, published on 14 August 2020.

> ***Protests against finance companies***
> **Mansa, 13 August (Staff Reporter)**
>
> > *Under the national call of the C.P.I. (ML) Liberation and Inqilabi Naujwan Sabha, the offices of private companies were cordoned off in protest by women victims of the debt trap of fi-*

nance companies. Inqilabi Naujwan Sabha state leader Binder Alkh, Liberation district leader Amrik Singh Samaun, All India Students Association (AISA) state president Pradeep Guru, Mazdoor Mukti Morcha leader Krishna Kaur said that RBI has given relief to the general public till August 31 that those who are unable to pay the installment cannot be forced to pay the installment by the bank or the finance company. The offense will be prosecuted but the operatives of private companies are blatantly violating these instructions and resorting to bullying. He demanded the government to take action against the perpetrators. Mahinder Kaur Khokhar, Khushpreet Kaur Khillan, Raj Rani, Gurmeet Kaur etc. of Mazdoor Mukti Morcha were present on the occasion.

Here as well, no direct quote has been attributed to Kaur. Instead, she is quoted alongside the Inqilabi Naujwan Sabha state leader Binder Alkh, and others. The total space of the news coverage given to Kaur was just 493.38 cm sq, including both news briefs.

To represent the viewpoints of the women protesting, the newspaper quoted men. For instance, Zora Singh Nasrali, the Punjab Khet Mazdoor union state president, was one of the most quoted leaders in the negligible coverage provided to the protests. A translated version of the news published on 24 August 2020, where Nasrali is quoted, is reproduced here:

Case to be registered against finance company for taking blank checks from working women – Zora Singh Nasrali
Lehra Mohabbat August 23 (Sukhpal Singh Sukhi Bhim Sen Hadwaria)

Punjab Khet Mazdoor Union State President Zora Singh Nasrali today at local dharamsala during a meeting with women workers regarding loans taken from finance companies urged them to file a case against the finance company for taking blank cheques from them. Meanwhile, he said that with the help of these blank cheques the cases could be filed against these companies. He said that despite the ban imposed by the Reserve Bank, the companies were openly collecting the installments. They are

threatening to confiscate household items if the installments are not paid.

Addressing the working women at Lehra Mohabbat and Lehiran Dhoorkot, he said that on August 25 the organization is organizing a protest in front of Manpreet Singh Badal's residence to demand waiver of debts of all workers including loans taken by companies, acquisition of plots of 10 marlas, waiver of domestic electricity, installing meters, reactivate the cut blue cards and to get the unclaimed land divided between workers and farmers.

He said that the Modi and Captain government did not fulfill their promises to the farm laborers and was imposing financial burden on the farmers and laborers. The laws in favor of corporate houses are making common people's lives hell. They are forced to commit suicide due to debt crunch. If the government does not comply with the demands, there will be a struggle against the government.

On this occasion committees of women workers were elected. Jaspal Kaur, Jaswant Kaur, Charanjit Kaur, Amandeep Kaur, Sunita Rani, Baljit Kaur, Jasbir Kaur, Kulwant Kaur, Paramjit Kaur, Jasbir Kaur and Amandeep Kaur. These committee members decided to participate in the 25th August protest.

The last paragraph mentions the participation and election of women community leaders but does not, however, quote them. The news article only quotes Nasrali, who in turn speaks on behalf of the women. Consider another example. Here, Lachhman Singh Sewewala, the general secretary of the Punjab Farm Workers Union, has been quoted along with Nasrali. Yet again, no women are quoted by the newspaper. A translation of the news published on 26 August 2020, containing Sewewala's quote, is reproduced here:

Marches to the Finance Minister's office against looting by finance companies

Bathinda August 25 (Kulwant Singh Sidhu)

Addressing the dharna, the state general secretary of the organization Lachhman Singh Sewewala, district committee

members Tirath Singh Kotha Guru and Mandeep Singh Sivia alleged that the high interest rates of finance companies had made the workers poor. They are forcing housewives to pay installments by threatening to confiscate household items and file a case. No government official is going to stop them. He said that the companies had taken blank checks from the women in the name of fraudulent identification and on the basis of which the companies were now in the process of filing cases against the women but it would not be tolerated.

In fact, the next section of the news also quotes all 'male' spokespersons of the union talking about womens' struggle.

Addressing the protest, Youth Bharat Sabha leader Ashwani Ghuda, Era Mohabbat Berman leader Gursewak Singh, DTF leader Resham Singh and Naujwan Bharat Sabha leader Manveer Singh announced their support. Spokespersons on the occasion warned the government that if the demands of the workers were not implemented, the farm workers would not back down from their struggle. Among others Kaka Singh Jida, Hansa Singh Kothe Natha Singh, Bogar Singh Mahima Sarja, Balwinder Singh Kala and Gurpreet Singh Lehra Mohabbat, Ramzan Mohammad Kotla among others addressed the gathering.

It is critical to mention that, in comparison to Kaur, Nasrali was given 994.19 cm sq coverage. Kaur, as we know, was given 493.38 cm sq coverage—almost half of the space allotted to Nasrali.

In the content analysis of four editions of *Ajit* in 31 days, only two instances were found where women were quoted directly talking about the women's marches against MFI. A translation of one such instance, published on 1 September 2020, is reproduced here:

Protest against the forced payment of installments at village Khudi Kalan Handiaya
Aug 31 (Gurjit Singh Khudi)

Women living near the railway gate of village Khudi Kalan protested and chanted slogans against the forcible payment of installments by the employees of private companies. In this re-

gard Sarabjit Kaur, Lakhveer Kaur, Manpreet Kaur, Asha Rani said that rural and urban poor people were broken due to the lockdown. At such times, people, especially to the micro finance companies, are unable to repay their loan installments, but microfinance companies are dealing with derogatory terms. The women said that the employees of these companies would be protested in the villages. Meenu Rani, Mamta Devi, Veerpal Kaur, Nirmala Devi, Amandeep Kaur etc. were present on the occasion.

Quotes were not attributed to any individual women, but rather to a group of four women. The total space given to this news clip is just 183.96 cm sq. In another news clipping from the Barnala edition, the Sangrur district president, Bibi Manjit Kaur, has been quoted on economic hardship. The total space given to this news is just 181.36 cm sq.

Aurat karza peedit sangharsh committee's elections held in Mahil Kalan
Mahil Kalan, August 10: (Avtar Singh Ankhi)

A meeting of Women's Struggle Committee (A) was held at Mahil Kalan under the chairmanship of District Barnala President Swaran Kaur Chapa and District Sangrur President Bibi Manjit Kaur Dasaundha Singh Wala. The meeting was attended by women borrowers from various private finance companies. President Bibi Manjit Kaur said that women were being harassed by the private companies due to economic hardship which would not be tolerated. They are all debt victims. She appealed to the women to be together for the debt-ridden women's struggle. President Kuldeep Kaur, Senior Vice President Kulwinder Kaur, Paramjit Kaur, Vice President Amandeep Kaur, Kuldeep Kaur, General Secretary Harpreet Kaur, General Secretary Gurmail Kaur, Secretary Manjeet Kaur and Bhinder Kaur were unanimously elected to the Mahil Kalan unit. Finance Secretary Paramjit Kaur and Joint Secretary Nita Devi were elected. Constituency Incharge Dr. Jagraj Singh Moom, Leader Avtar Singh Bhattal, Balwinder Singh Deol etc. were present.

CONCLUSION

The media coverage received for the women's agitation against the microfinance companies was minimal. Factors including urgency, relevance and context were often missing from the little coverage that was undertaken, and the interests of women agitating against the MFI were given negligible space.

The coverage was not just inadequate but hyper-local as well. Only a handful of rallies was given coverage in the district pages of newspapers (as indicated by Chart B), evading the fact that the agitation was taking place in most districts of Punjab and thereby disregarding the larger picture and relevance of protests.

Although these protests were led by women, hardly any women leaders or protestors were given coverage. Men were occupying the space on behalf of the women. The analysis above demonstrates that the coverage was neither inclusive nor sensitive to the gender-specific needs of this developing story.

The quantitative and qualitative analysis of the lopsided coverage demonstrates why the media coverage of the protests played to the thinking of the dominant class, and emphasises that the importance of women's rights and their agitation was once again ignored, in line with the underlying societal status quo where men speak on behalf of women.

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ANALYSING ANDHRA JYOTHI'S COVERAGE OF AN HONOUR KILLING IN HYDERABAD IN SEPTEMBER 2020

/ Santo Thomas

ABSTRACT

This case study analyses the media coverage of the honour killing of Hemanth Kumar, an interior designer, in the IT city of Hyderabad. The killing was carried out by the family of Kumar's wife, Avanti, in September 2020. The couple resided in Hyderabad at the time, and had sought protection from the police, but before the latter came to help, Kumar was killed. The study uses quantitative and qualitative analyses, counting the space and columns allotted to the killing, as well as the number of paragraphs and words forming the newspaper reports about it. Andhra Jyothi*'s focus is primarily on producing matter-of-fact coverage as the events unfolded, right from Hemanth's death to what occurred at the police station.*

It further concludes that Andhra Jyothi *covered Kumar's death as a human-interest story. Among other aspects, the articles detailed Avanti's relationship with Hemanth, their love story, how Avanti's parents and relatives treated her badly; and interviews with Hemanth's mother and Avanti. The study further observes how media coverage often deals with such stories as fleeting incidents, without a deeper in-*

trospection into the menacing prevalence of caste and class prejudices, or to the extent that these biasses can lead to honour killings in Indian society.

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CASTE AND HONOUR KILLINGS

We continue to encounter the intangible, yet vivid, form of discrimination that prevails in Indian society. Four Varnas proliferate to countless castes and sub-castes in South Asia. There are over six thousand castes and sub castes, out of which over three thousand are socially marginalised in one way or the other. Caste dominance is further strengthened by the amassing of assets including land and money. There are multiple factors involved beyond politics, including socioeconomic factors, inter-caste, inter-faith marriages and religious biases. The socioeconomic situation could be dealt with to an extent, by introducing land ceiling laws and the abolition of the zamindari system, zamindars giving up land and special privileges, moving from rural to urban places. This and reservations paved the way for the marginalised to fill their positions and advance politically and socially in the aftermath of the Mandal Commission. After the Information Technology revolution, migration from rural to urban areas for better education and jobs for the educated among the lowered castes started taking place; this too could blur the caste contours to some extent, making it a lesser taboo. Yet, honour killings, and caste killings, are among the many markers of how lower castes are continuously oppressed by those higher in the caste hierarchy.

The caste or class angle is considered crucial in any honour killing. In Telugu-speaking undivided Andhra Pradesh state, power is concentrated in the hands of a few privileged communities. During the Nizam's rule, members of the Velama and Reddy castes came together to assume the functions of landlords, revenue officials and so on. After the state's merger into the Indian union, they became public representatives, politicians and officials. The question of inclusiveness of the historically marginalised community also remains a political problem in the state. Historically, the Brahmins, and subsequently Reddys, Velamas and Kammas—all in single digit percentages of the population—held political power for long years. The Reddys, comprising just about eight percent of the population in the united Andra Pradesh state, held sway over the chief minister post of the state for 32 years, the Kammas with five percentage ruled for 16 years, the Brahmins, with less than three percentage for five years, while the Backward Classes, comprising 50 percent of the population of the state, were in power for less than two years and Dalits, making up 16 percent of the population, for

merely two years. Scheduled Tribe or Muslim communities were never represented as a Chief Minister. This power status, wherein the state is run with power in the hands of a few dominant groups, is still rampant in the Telugu-speaking areas, where the dominant caste groups feel protected and get away from crimes such as honour killings. According to the senior journalist Satish Chandra, there has been a spurt in caste crimes after 2014. This could be due to various reasons, including the policies of different political parties and the fact that positions of power continue to remain the stronghold of dominant groups. In such a scenario, should the media not be questioned for avoiding difficult questions about this state of affairs?

The work of forums such as the Telangana State Bahujan Resistance Forum—TSBRF—are important to acknowledge, since they are committed to social justice for lower castes. According to the report published in *The Hindu* on 12 August 2021,[1] the TSBRF filed a PIL in the Telangana High Court in 2019, seeking responses from the police on already filed cases and compliance with the guidelines laid down by the apex court on *Shakti Vahini Vs Union of India*, 2018. The TSBRF claimed that 36 persons died due to honour killings in the state, but the police filed a memo claiming that only four such instances had been reported over four years, from 2017 onwards.

Andhra Jyothi newspaper

The term "Andhra Jyothi" literally translates to "the light of Andhra Pradesh." Launched on 1 July 1960 by KLN Prasad, it is one of the oldest-running Telugu newspapers, alongside *Eenadu*. Currently, Vemuri Radha Krishna is the managing director of *Andhra Jyothi* and other media affiliates. Often known as ABN Radha Krishna in political circles and media circles, he took over in 2008. He hails from the Kamma community. Despite its meagre population of five percent, the Kamma community is affluent, and wields political, social and economic influence. Outlets such as *Andhra Jyothi* and *Eenadu* tend to be exclusively run by members of this community.

The Audit Bureau of Circulation is a non-profit, voluntary organisation founded in 1948 to certify and audit the circulation of major publications, including newspapers and magazines in India. According to ABC, *Andhra Jyothi* was the third-largest circulated newspaper after *Eenadu* and Sakshi in 2019.

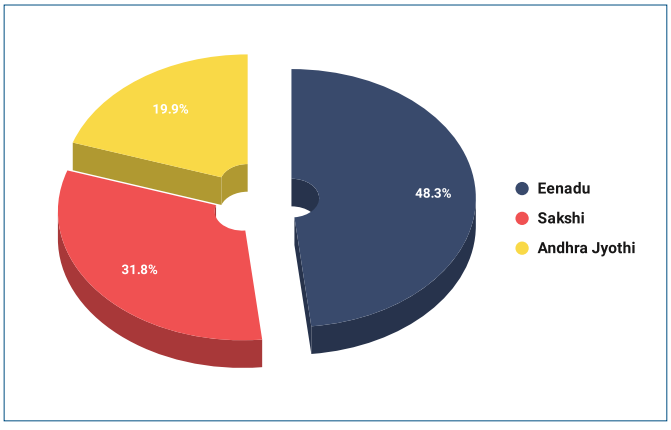

Chart 1: Circulation from June to December 2019

The Case Study

Avanti and Hemanth lived in the same locality and were neighbours, but came from different castes and economic statuses. Avanti, a 23-year-old woman, was a Reddy, the landed upper caste. Her family owned huge tracts of land, regarded themselves as lords and ran a real-estate business on the side. Hemanth Kumar, a 28-year-old interior designer lived on small means and came from a small petty trading community.

They were in love for eight years. Avanti's parents reprimanded her for it, eventually placing her under what was effectively house arrest for eight months. Somehow, on 9 June 2020, she escaped and got married the next day at the Santoshimatha temple in Hyderabad. After the marriage, the couple called on the police, seeking protection. The police summoned the couple's parents and counselled Avanti's parents, but Avanti's uncle, Murali Krishna, began threatening the couple and Hemanth's parents while they were at the police station. Despite threats, Avanti refused to file a complaint against her father, hoping that someday he would realise his mistake and accept them as family. Avanti then returned the parts of her father's will that were allocated to her, making it clear that she was not seeking any assets from him. The couple began to reside in Gachibowli, in TNGO colony, Hyderabad.

On 24 September 2020, in broad daylight, Avanti's family and relatives walked into the couple's house, asking them to go home with them to talk. The couple initially refused but then got into their car. Avanti noticed they were on the wrong route back to her home and immediately jumped out of the car, along with Hemanth. Her uncle and other

relatives then chased the couple, put Hemanth into another car and kidnapped him, leaving Avanti there. Avanti and Hemanth's parents called on the police, who immediately summoned Avanti's parents. According to the police investigation that emerged, Avanti's father had provided an award of one million rupees for ending his son-in-law's life. The police tracked down the culprits and found Hemanth's dead body.

According to preliminary police investigations and newspaper articles, the reason for murder was primarily that Hemanth was not from their caste and Hemanth was not as financially sound as Avanti's family, since his family didn't own a house. Hemanth's economic status had infuriated Avanti's parents. "Hemanth was from a different caste, almost at par with Avanti's but economically weaker. The landed castes often think like they are the royalties, so even if it is not a big difference in terms of the caste status, they became intolerant about Avanti's choice for her partner who did not possess land assets," said Dasharat Aralla, a civil-liberties-and-criminal lawyer in Hyderabad. "It was no doubt a honour killing, born out of both the caste and class intolerance," Aralla said.

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

The *Andhra Jyothi* newspaper adheres to a 5-6 column format. Its average size is 50cm x 32cm. In the data collated below, the space and columns allotted, number of paragraphs and number of words penned by the newspaper are counted and recorded. According to this data, *Andhra Jyothi*'s focus is primarily on producing coverage as the events unfolded, right from Hemanth's death to what occurred at the police station.

On 26 September 2020, an article was published on page 3 of the newspaper, with a jump line to page 14. On Page 3, there was a boxed article, with two columns of news at the bottom. It is a lead story with a pull quote (important quotes pulled from the main articles), with not more than 37 words.

The article begins by identifying the following facts:

- Where (denoting the location of the incident)

- When (specifying the incident with proper date and time)
- What (specifying what actually the incident be called—honour killing)
- Why (reason for such heinous crime)
- Who (victims in the incident)

It amounts to 152 words and its size is approximately 12.75cm x 12cm.

The same story was published on page 14 of the newspaper, with three columns of news, covering half of the page. The story covers and unveils how the incident occurred with the prior and preliminary investigation from the police; a four-paragraph news report with three special boxed paragraphs, which included the opinions of the victim about the incident and the further course of action to be taken. It amounts to around 666 words within 7 paragraphs, and its size is approximately 25.5cm x 20cm.

On 27 September, there was no follow-up to this incident in *Andhra Jyothi* but there was a mention in *Namaste Telangana*, a Telangana-based newspaper with a circulation of three lakhs. Its average size is 50cm x 32cm.

On page 2 of the newspaper, there was a boxed article with three columns of news, at the bottom centre of the newspaper. The headline had three words and pull quotes amounted to fifteen words. The size of this story was approximately 12cm x 16cm, with a word count of 307.

On 28 September, the article was continued and published on Page 2 of *Andhra Jyothi*. This was a boxed article, with three columns of news, near the bottom-left of the newspaper. It had a word count of 293, within two paragraphs. The size of the story was approximately 12cm x 19.2cm. A headline was picked up from the lead story, with four words and a sub-heading of 12 words.

The article's content includes how Avanti was tortured by her mother; when events turned ugly after she married Hemanth; what she feels now, as after Hemanth's death, she is terrified of further threats from her family; and Avanti speaking about Hemanth, revealing that he had anticipated that someday this would happen.

On 29 September, the continuation of the article was published on page 1 and 2 of *Andhra Jyothi*.

On page 1, there was a teaser—that is, it was printed with a jump line towards the bottom left of the newspaper—along with a photograph and snippet of the story. It was a single-column story, with 22 words (a pull quote). The size of the teaser was approximately 8cm x 4cm.

On page 2 was a boxed article, with two columns, at the bottom centre of the newspaper. It had a headline with three words and a pull quote of 16 words. The length of the story was 367 words, with three paragraphs The size of this story was approximately 12.5cm x 12.8cm. The content of the article includes what happened with the police preliminary investigations, how Avanti's parents confessed to the crime, and scene recreation.

On 30 September, the continuation of the article was published on page 2 of the newspaper.

This was a boxed article, with two columns, at the bottom centre of the newspaper. It had a headline of three words and a pull quote of nine words. The word count was 258, within two paragraphs. The size of this story was approximately 12.5cm x 12.8cm. The content of the article includes what had materialised since (the case had moved to the fast-track court) No article was printed between 1 and 14 October.

On 15 October 2020, the continuation of the article was published on page 9. This was a candid interview with Avanti and Hemanth's mother. It was lengthy, with four columns covering three fourths of the page, a pull quote at the top of the article comprising 68 words and a headline with three words. The content of the article includes what transpired (recollecting the memories of both Avanti and her mother-in-law). The word count was 675, within 9 paragraphs, and the size of this story was approximately 38.5cm x 21.2cm.

Additional articles on caste- or honour killings

On 29 September, there was a rectangular boxed article, with space reduced from six to four columns, on page 4. It was 608 words within 8 paragraphs, with an approximate size of 8cm x 32cm.

It contained:

- What (on dominance)
- What (a comparison of honour killing with COVID-19; albeit the latter didn't show any interest in social hierar-

chies)

- What and where (mentions of other honour killings or caste killings in a paragraph)
- Talk of a patriarchal system and caste hierarchies

On 30 September, on page 4 of the newspaper, there was a rectangular boxed article with column space reduced from six to four. The word count was 507, within 5 paragraphs, and the size is approximately 8cm x 32cm.

It included:

- What (commentary on police and the law)
- How (police and society take the marginalised for granted)
- 570 words within 5 paragraphs

Charts and Tables

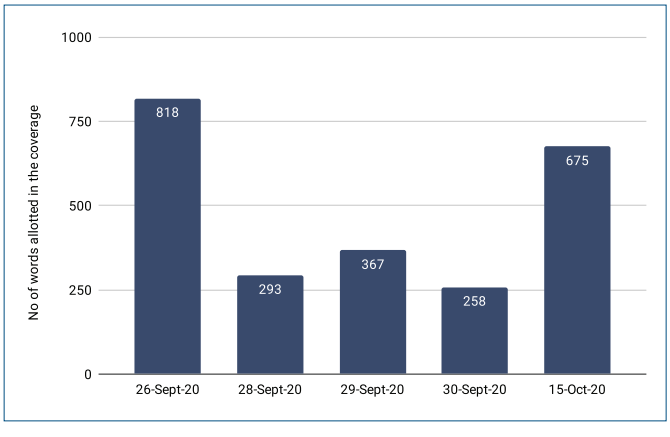

Chart 2: Number of words allotted in the coverage

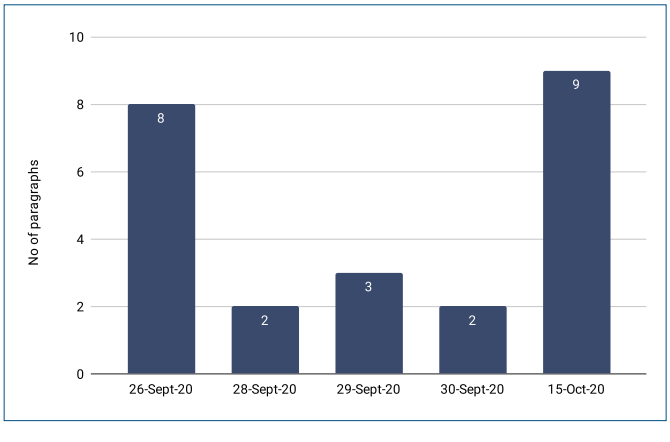

Chart 3: Number of Paragraphs allotted in the coverage

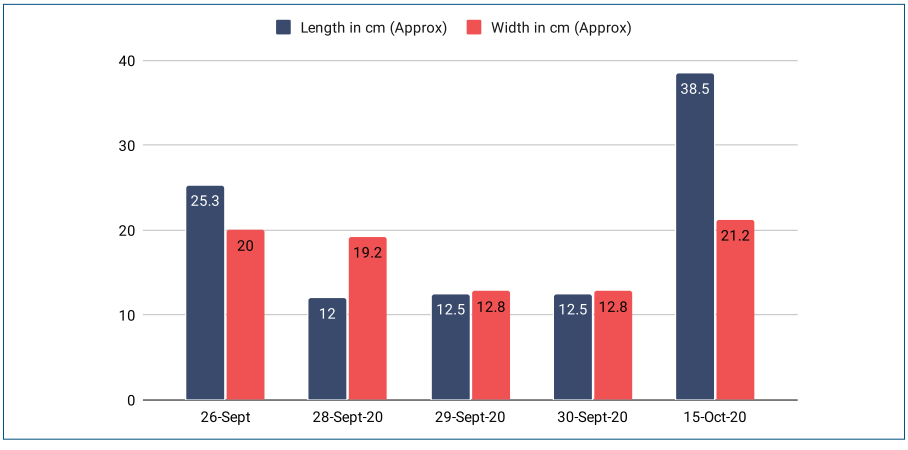

Chart 4: Length and width allotted in the coverage

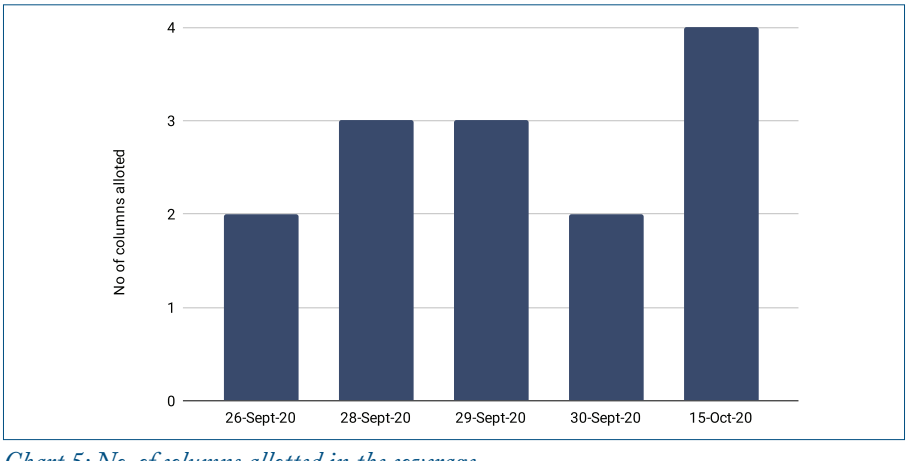

Chart 5: No. of columns allotted in the coverage

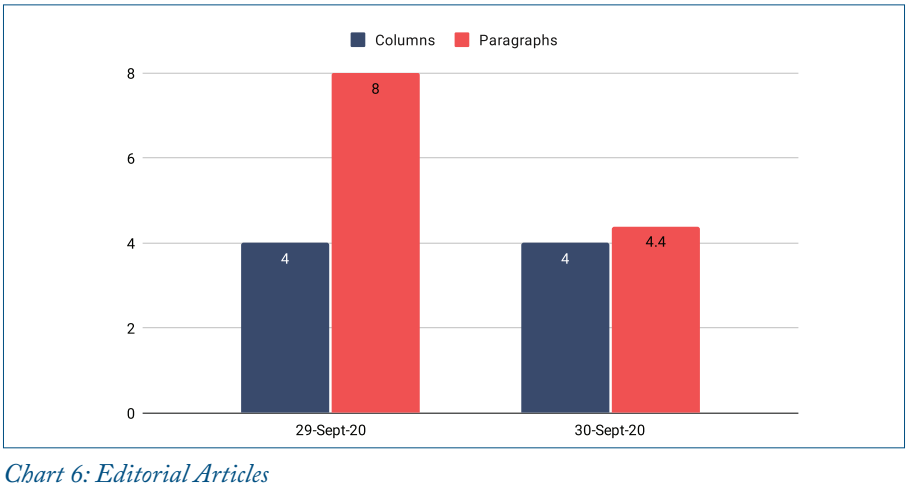

Chart 6: Editorial Articles

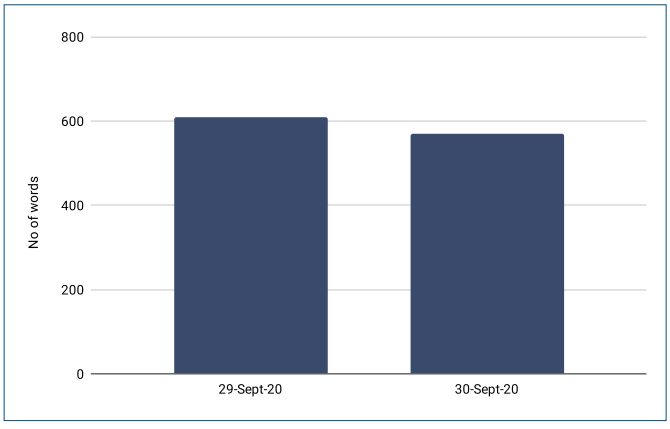

Chart 7: the number of words in the Editorial Articles

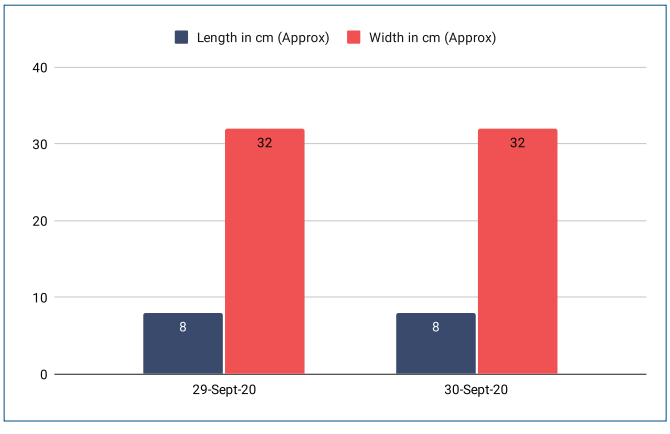

Chart 8: Length and width allotted in the Editorial Articles

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

The coverage of *Andhra Jyothi* was mostly about Avanti's relationship with Hemanth; their love story; how Avanti's parents and relatives treated her badly; how Avanti sought protection and called on the police to take action against their parents; how social activists flocked in to console Avanti; and candid interviews with Hemanth's mother and Avanti.

On the whole, the paper covered the news in the form of a news report with a human-interest, and that helped to draw a large amount of attention since it also took place in the heart of India's famous IT city. A few other detailed articles extensively addressed the underlying patriarchal system. Overall, media coverage has tended to deal with honour-killing stories as fleeting incidents. However, the paper's coverage

showed this as an isolated incident, and there was no serious attempt to cover the larger trends prevalent in the society, of how the caste and class dominance prevailing in marriages results in day-to-day discrimination and even honour killings. Laws such as Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 and recent *Shakti Vahini vs Union of India*, 2018 seem futile, despite being measures taken to curtail such brutality against honour killings at the social level. And the media seems to show very little interest to take on the big social prejudices.

CONCLUSION

Theoretically speaking, in a democratic society, where people interact with each other, inter-caste and inter-faith marriages should pave the way for the reduction of taboos surrounding caste and religion, but at the same time they may lead to chilling instances of violence such as the brutal death of Hemanth. Another expectation is that modernity, education, cosmopolitanism, and so on would lead to a progressive culture among people, but what we see in today's India is that the caste, class and feudal values travel with people from villages to towns, and from the medieval era to modern times. Laws to limit the killings turn futile; primarily because in the social and political hierarchy, certain castes think they are far superior to others. *Andhra Jyothi* stayed clear of addressing the rigid power structures in society, which repeatedly cause such incidents. Media coverage did not help the readers introspect on these incidents, instead, it treated the story as an individual crime story which generated an interest in the details, like an unfolding crime story. The coverage in that sense failed to question the feudalistic and casteist thinking that, still prevalent in the IT city, has no place in a civilised world.

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HOW HINDUSTAN TIMES COVERED THE ATTACK ON THE INDIAN PARLIAMENT

/ Vinod K Jose

ABSTRACT

This case study analyses the media reporting of the 13 December 2001 terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament, a national security conflict. Following the attack, India made the biggest ever military mobilisation in its history, moving over a million soldiers and war equipments to its border with Pakistan. Even the skirmishes that followe killed more Indian soldiers than Kargil War. Four people were given death penalties for the attack by the trial court, out of which two were acquitted by the High Court and Supreme Court, one's punishment was reduced, and one was given the death penalty. The study carries out a quantitative content analysis of the Hindustan Times*, New Delhi's most-read newspaper, followed by a qualitative content analysis of the media coverage of the conflict. The qualitative content analysis uses multiple sources like the first information reports, confessional statements, affidavits, charge sheets, cross examination documents, judgments, editorials, pamphlets, TV broadcasts, and private communication between involved parties on the nature of media coverage etc.*

In its coverage of the 13 December attack, the media brought together many scattered narratives and influences, from national security to the global war on terrorism, Kashmiri separatism and Islamophobia. There was a terrible imbalance visible in the representation of points of view, as the quantitative and qualitative analyses demonstrate. The police or government version far outnumbered all other perspectives, in area and the prominence of the display. If at all there were rare occasions during which the media attempted to use sources besides the police as the main source of information, this happened at a much later stage, after the involvement of activists and university professors. The media also reported information based on forced confessions, published misinformation and lies, and selectively ignored certain facts that could have been verified against records placed in the court. Further, it did not rectify its faulty journalism practices even after the Delhi High Court and Supreme Court strongly objected to the "media trial," "lies the police planted" and so on. The study looks into how the media covered the versions of the accused, many of whom were acquitted later by the courts.

VINOD K JOSE is an award-winning Indian journalist with twenty five years of experience as an editor, investigative reporter, longform writer and radio news producer. He studied journalism at Columbia Journalism School, and was the Radcliffe Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University. Vinod has a PhD on the sociology of Indian newsrooms.

THE TERROR ATTACK ON INDIAN PARLIAMENT

On 13 December 2001, the Indian Parliament was in its winter session—a stormy one. The government and the opposition were locked in a stalemate over the Comptroller and Auditor General—or CAG—report on irregularities in a Ministry of Defence procurement of coffins for soldiers killed in the 1999 Kargil conflict with Pakistan. For the third consecutive day, both Houses of Parliament were adjourned. In the Lok Sabha, the Opposition members did not allow the House to begin its business, by shouting slogans like: *"Kafan chor gadi choro"*—coffin thief, quit office, as reported in the *Hindustan Times*.[1] The government, which had originally planned to table the bill on Prevention of Terrrorism Ordinance (POTO), failed to do so when both the Houses were adjourned by 11.20 am. At 11.30 am, as the Parliamentarians were about to leave the House, five armed men, in a white Ambassador car fitted with an improvised explosive device, drove through the gates of Parliament House. When they were challenged by security men, the armed men jumped out of the car and opened fire. In the encounter that followed, all the attackers were killed, along with eight security men and a gardener. Within hours, the Army was called to take control of sensitive buildings in Delhi. The few hundreds of parliamentarians inside the House were evacuated with heavy protection. Through live television broadcasts the incident reached the public as the news that "the most daring and deadliest terrorist attack took place in independent India."[2] Hours after the attack, in a special broadcast on the government-owned television channel *Doordarshan*, Prime Minister AB Vajpayee said it was an attack on India's democracy and that his government took it very seriously. He also compared the assault to the 9/11 attacks in the US.

On 14 December, 2001, at the hundredth anniversary function of the newspaper *The Pioneer,* the prime minister reiterated his comparison of 13 December 2001 to 9/11 and warned the country to prepare itself for "any kind of drastic situation." In the same function, the Home Minister LK Advani also compared the attack on Parliament to the attack on the World Trade Centre. He added "India's national security was in danger and the country's response would be keeping in mind the attack on Parliament was an attack on India's national security."[3]

As days went by, the government parted with more information on

the motives and players behind the attack. On 18 December 2001, Advani issued a four-page suo motu statement in Parliament that said "the Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad carried out the Dec 13 attack on Parliament and police had complete proof of it."

Before the home minister's statement in the Parliament, the police officially named 12 people as having participated in the conspiracy. In a press conference on 15 December 2001, the Delhi Police Commissioner Ajay Raj Sharma announced these names: "Ghazi Baba, Maulana Masood Azhar, Tariq Ahmed (all from Pakistan and belonged to Jaish-e-Mohammad); five deceased 'Pakistani terrorists'; and three Kashmiri men, S.A.R. Geelani, Mohammad Afzal, and Shaukat Hussain Guru; and Shaukat's wife Afsan Guru." The last four were the only ones to be arrested and tried in court. The police booked the charges under different sections of the Indian Penal Code and POTO, including conspiracy and waging war against the state. The lower court gave two death penalties each to Afzal, Geelani and Shaukat for waging war against the state and conspiracy, and convicted Afsan, ordering five years imprisonment for conspiracy. The Delhi High Court acquitted Geelani and Afsan from all the charges and retained the death sentences of the other two. The Supreme Court retained the High Court acquittal of Geelani and Afsan, while reducing Shaukat's death penalty to life imprisonment and retaining Afzal Guru's death penalty.

Afzal was eventually given the death penalty in 2011. Since the beginning of the attack on Parliament on 13 December 2001, all parliamentary parties maintained their official view on the attack of Parliament House as a "terrorist attack," an "attack on Indian democracy," an "attack on India's sovereignty" and an attack on "national security."[4]

The first opinion column that described the attack on Parliament as an attack on the national security and on India's sovereignty was one by the senior journalist Pankaj Vohra. On 16 December 2001 in the *Hindustan Times*, Vohra argued that "the dastardly attack on the Parliament House by suspected Islamic fundamentalists should serve as an eye-opener both for government and opposition, for the attack was a challenge to India's national security and its sovereignty."

In the tense days that followed, the government maintained it had "incontrovertible evidence" of Pakistan's involvement in the attack. This was followed by the open threat of war and massive mobilisation of

nearly a million soldiers on the Indo-Pak border. Troops were moved from every corner of the country. The entire border with Pakistan was mined, for the first time since 1971. India's defense minister called the biggest ever mobilisation of the Indian army and the largest ever preparation for a war. Troop movement started in less than 48 hours after the attack. Five special trains of Indian Army men were moved from Secunderabad to Jammu. The subcontinent was pushed to the brink of a nuclear war. On 30 December 2001, Indian Defense Minister George Fernandes said "We [India] could take a nuclear strike, survive and then hit back. Pakistan would be finished." This is one claim that shows how serious the countries were about using nuclear weapons. A massive flow of international appeal followed in the next few days. Eighteen heads of governments asked India to exercise restraint.

Indian and Pakistani troops exchanged fire at many border areas. On 19 December 2001, a *Hindustan Times* report titled "India, Pakistan troops exchange fire, four villages are evacuated" said: "Indian and Pakistani troops exchanged ferocious fire along the Nowshera and R.S. Pura Sectors along the International border and the Line of control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir on Tuesday evening. The Indian Army claimed to have heavily damaged some Pakistani posts." Photographs of soldiers in war preparation at the border areas began appearing in newspapers by 24 December 2001, and then regularly occupied a lot of space. The lead story on 24 December 2001 had a sensational display of a photo with graphics, as if the country was at war. The report, titled "Pak Positions Pounded as Border Hots Up," began: "The border build-up reached a flash point on Sunday when Indian and Pakistani troops engaged in a fierce gun battle in the Samba and Poonch Sectors." Reports of the mass exodus of civilians from the border districts of Rajasthan and Punjab started appearing in newspapers the same day. Headlined "Border Tension Triggers Exodus from Villages," the report began: "Thousands of villagers in states along the border with Pakistan are heading for the interiors, fearing a war." Photographs were printed of civilians moving in exodus on 3 January 2002; a villager in Akhnoor taking refuge under a huge pipe to avoid shelling along the LoC, on 2 January 2002; border villagers in exodus with rucksacks tied on donkeys' backs, on 11 January 2002, gave the visual effects of a war-like situation at the border.

Army mobilisation and undeclared attacks were not the only offen-

sives between the two countries. On 22 December 2001, India recalled its High Commissioner from Pakistan and suspended air, rail and bus communications. Many foreign embassies in these two countries evacuated their staff, and citizens and tourists travelling to South Asia were issued cautionary travel advisories. Some essays estimated the cost of this war-mobilisation for India alone at Rs. 10,000 crore.[5]

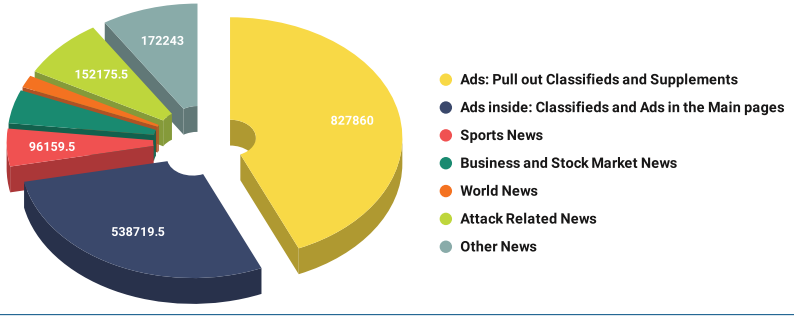
Decisions fuelling the war build-up in the name of "national interest" continued throughout the period of study. The Indian Army cancelled the Army Day parade, for the first time since 1949. The move was a message to Pakistan about the scale of India's military preparation. The Army's unwillingness to spare a few thousand troops from a million-strong force was the message. Announcing the Army decision, *Hindustan Times* quoted an anonymous source in the defense ministry: "It sends a message that we're ready to do something that we've not done for 54 years. It conveys a resolve," said a defence official." Along with this report on the front page was a sensational display of a photograph of Indian tanks making their way to the border. The government introduced a "war tax" to meet the cost of the war preparations. Preparations like this sent the message countrywide that a war was near. The message in everybody's mind was that 13 December was a national security conflict.

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

This study analyses the content of the *Hindustan Times*, New Delhi edition, for 31 days, between 14 December 2001 and 13 January 2002.

Number of days analysed: 31 days / Total area analysed: 19, 04,078 cm²

*Chart 1: Distribution of Total Area in the Content Analysed**



Out of the space analysed, advertisements (ads and supplements in pullouts as well as classifieds and ads in the main pages together) occupy 13,66,579.5 cm^2, which is 71.77 percent of the total area. This leaves a space of 5,37,498.5 cm^2 for news. The break-up of this news area is given in the following chart.

*Chart 2: Distribution of Total News Area**

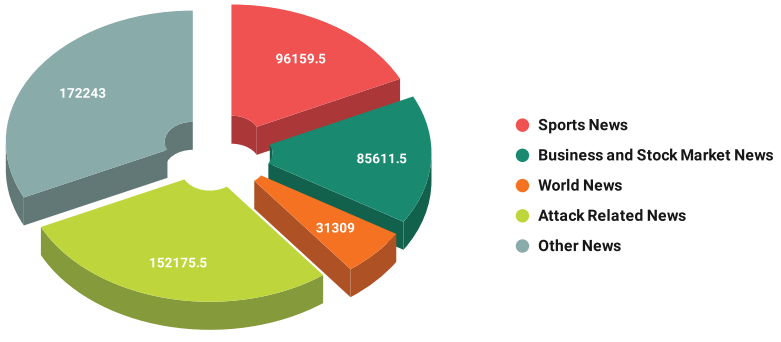


Chart 3: Points of view represented in the attack-related news:

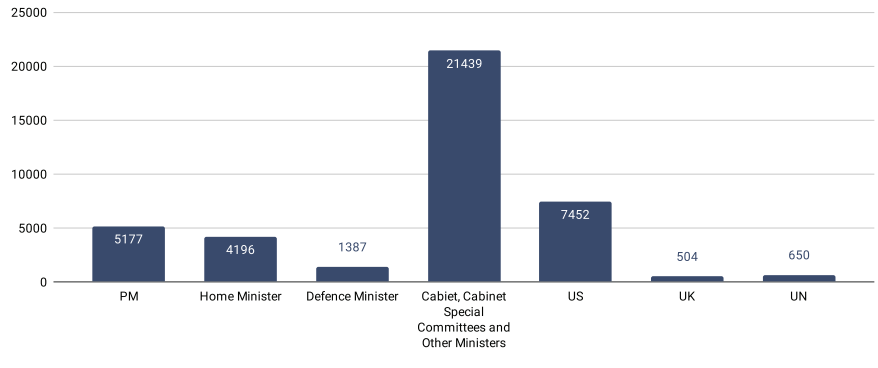
Chart 3 shows the quantitative representation of each of the following interest groups in the conflict:

- Governmental: *the prime minister; home minister; defence minister; cabinet, cabinet special committees, Ministry of External Affairs and other ministries*
- Foreign governments: *(US, UK, Israel, China, Russia, Pakistan) and international organisations (UN) and personages (the Pope)*
- Political parties: *BJP, Congress, and other parties*
- Market interests
- Crime stories: *information from and about investigative agencies, police and intelligence agencies*
- Indian Army
- The four arrested/accused
- Security men killed in the attack
- Militants killed in the attack
- LeT and Jaish-e-Mohammad
- Kashmir government and political leaders who take part in

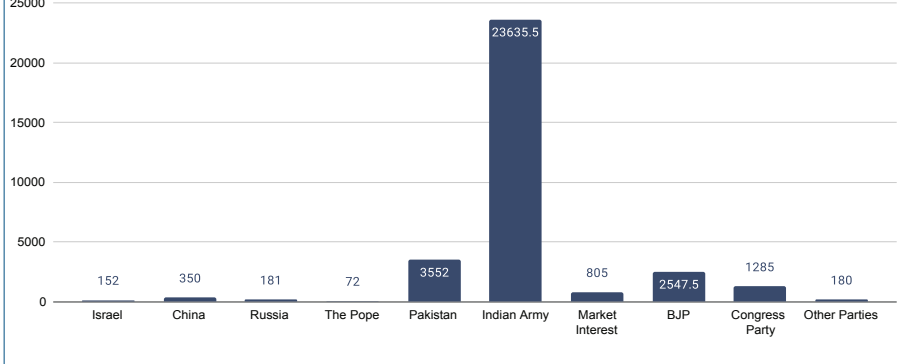
elections

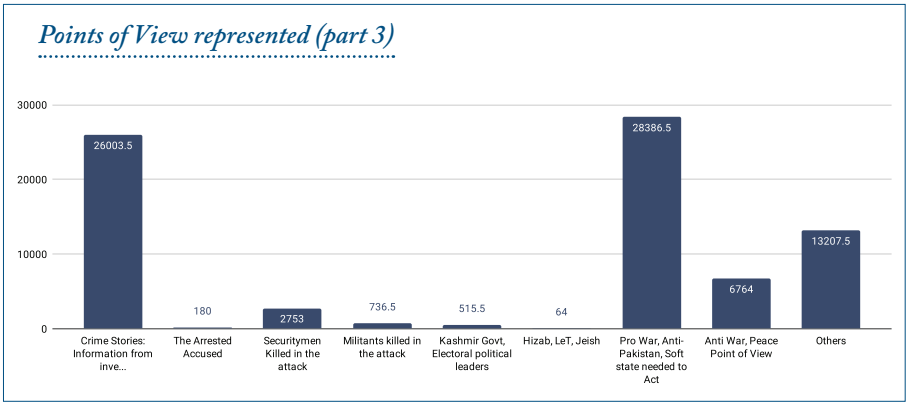
- Pro-War—Anti-Pakistan—*"Soft State Needed to Act Tough" etc. points of view of unofficial parties other than those mentioned above.*
- Anti-war and peace points of view
- Others (like plain graphics of events, people at the border, landlords in Delhi, train commuters between India and Pakistan etc.)

Chart 3: Points of View represented (part 1)



Points of View represented (part 2)





Put together, the Indian government (the prime minister; home minister; defence minister; cabinet, cabinet special committees and other ministries) received 32,199 cm^2, which is 21.16 percent of the attack-related news.

Crime stories (information from investigative agencies, police and intelligence agencies) constituted 26,003.5 cm^2, which is 17.09 percent of the attack-related news. The Indian Army received 23,635.5 cm^2, which is 15.53 percent of the total attack-related news' area.

As per the quantitative figures, one of the less represented points of view was that of the arrested accused, like SAR Geelani, Shaukat Guru, and Afzal Guru. Geelani received 180 cm^2, which is 0.01 percent of the total attack-related news, while Shaukat Guru and Afzal Guru had none at all. Even the coverage Geelani received, which is called here "the arrested accused's points of view," had quotes not from Geelani but from his family members. The 180 cm^2-area consisted of two reports datelined from Kashmir. Quoting his family, one report said Geelani was innocent and was falsely implicated in the case. The other report said Geelani's brother and family were missing.

The investigation implicated organisations like the Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e- Mohammad and Hizbul Mujahideen in the case. The source for this was Afzal's confessional statement to the police. The point of view of these organisations received 64 cm^2, which is 0.004 percent of the attack-related news. The coverage they received also did not come as an independent report or article. It was mentioned in the editorial of 25 December 200, titled "Murder with a Design." The editorial started quoting Salahuddin, head of the Hizbul Mujahideen, that "none of the Mujahideen groups was involved in any killings of civilians, and doing

so is an act of misrepresentation." Hizbul denied its involvement in the 13 December attack. The editorial strongly criticised Salahuddin's statement and asked that if they never committed violence against civilians how were the Pandits in Kashmir killed in early 1990s. The newspaper did not carry the statement of Hizbul Mujahideen chief as a report.

The other half of the 64 cm^2 area these organisations received was on 31 December 2001. In a one-paragraph item titled "Lashkar letter to US," the newspaper quoted Lashkar-e-Taiba's open letter to the US after the organisation was put in the list of terrorist outfits by the US administration. The letter is quoted: "The policies of Lashkar might differ from that [sic] of the US but we do not mean any harm to any US citizen or property and are not connected to any terrorist attacks." Organisations like LeT denied the charge of the Indian government and said that they had no role in the attack. But this news was available only through the international wire stories, not in the *Hindustan Times*. The Pakistani newspaper *Dawn* published an *Agence France Presse* wire report on its front page on 2 January 2002, that said "Lashkar-e-Taiba spokesman Yahya Mujahid told AFP ... we are against all acts of terrorism and we have repeatedly said we are not involved in the Dec 13 attack on the Indian Parliament." [6] The quantitative content analysis showed that a whopping print area went one-sided with no attempts to represent the points of view of the other side, either of the accused arrested or of the organisations accused of having made the attack.

Another little-represented point of view was of Kashmiri politicians. While Kashmir was on the centre stage of this conflict, Kashmiri politicians received only 515.5 cm^2, which is 00.3 percent of the total area. In addition, the only one politician heard in this report was the Jammu and Kashmir National Conference Chairman Farooq Abdullah, who was then the chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir.

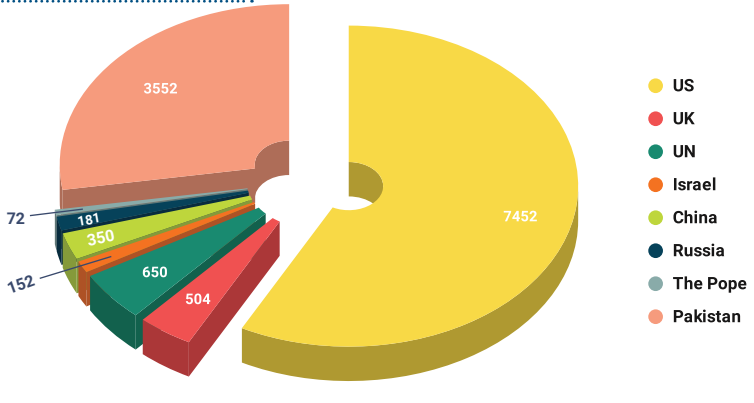
The US administration's comments on the attack received significant coverage. It amounted to 7,452 cm^2, which is 4.9 percent of the total area. Interestingly, the coverage explaining the US viewpoint on the attack was more than the coverage of the Indian prime minister or home minister, which came to only 3.4 percent and 2.7 percent respectively. A point to be noted here is that this was the period when the US had mooted the war against terrorism and was fighting a war in Afghanistan. However, the coverage calculated was excluding those of the US engagements elsewhere; it was solely of the US administration's

points of view on the attack on India's parliament and the hot pursuit carried out by the Indian government. Thus, the reasons that Indian newspapers gave more coverage to US interests than to India's own prime minister could be a research question in itself.

Chart 4 shows the coverage received by foreign governments and international organisations. The US topped it with 57.7 percent while the UN received only 5 percent. Pakistan, which was regarded as the principal opposite party of the conflict, received 27.5 percent coverage. Most of the news from Pakistan was its official reactions, diplomatic decisions taken against India's decisions, like calling back envoys, banning its air space for Pakistani aircrafts, stopping the train across the border, mobilisation of its army, etc.

The coverage received by the UK was 3.9 percent , and all of it came when its prime minister at the time, Tony Blair, visited India and Pakistan in the first week of January 2002. In order to obtain 3.9 percent of the coverage, the UK prime minister had to be in the sub-continent personally, while no US official visited the area during this period studied and still managed 57.7 percent coverage.

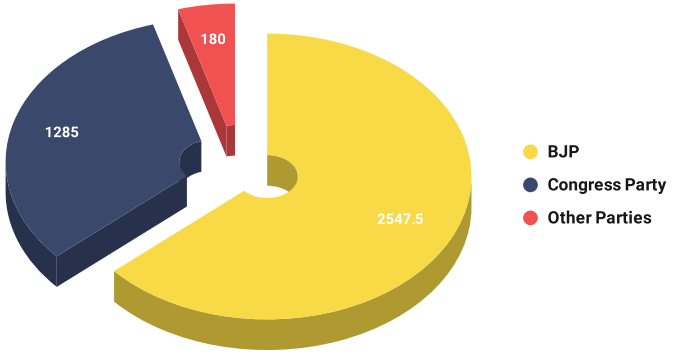
Chart 4: Representation of Foreign Governments and International Organizations



Another significant data point that comes out of the chart on points of view represented (Chart 5 below) is the representation of political parties in the news. The BJP, the main constituent of the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA), received 2,547.5 cm^2, which is 63.50

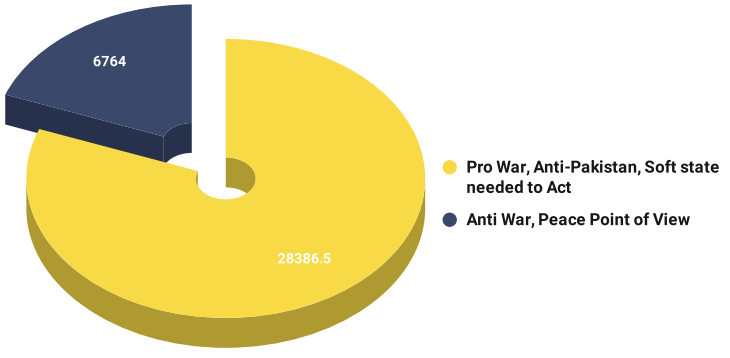
percent of the space occupied by all political parties. The opposition—the Congress party—received 32.02 percent, and all the other parties together received 4.48 percent. The space that the BJP occupied was mostly for its pro-war, anti-Pakistan statements and those pressing the government to continue the hot pursuit. On the other hand, most of the space the Congress occupied was for its criticism on the security lapse at the Parliament and the government's decision to send teams of MPs from across party lines to strategic countries in order to explain India's case against Pakistan. Even though the Congress did not attack the plan itself, it criticised the NDA government for not taking its consent and for forming such teams arbitrarily. However, the Congress's criticism stopped after the prime minister, AB Vajpayee, talked to its leader, Sonia Gandhi. The representation of the other parties (4.48 percent) was for their immediate reactions after the attack on the Parliament. They received no coverage thereafter. The opinions of these parties during the war mobilisation were completely absent in the newspaper.

Chart 5: Representation of Political Parties



The analysis of space, barring governmental and political parties, given to pro-war and anti-war points of view was carried out above, in the Points of View Represented chart (Chart 3). Most of these were opinion pieces and reports, written mostly by senior journalists, retired intelligence officers, members of the security think tank, et al.

Chart 6: Representation of Foreign Governments and International Organizations



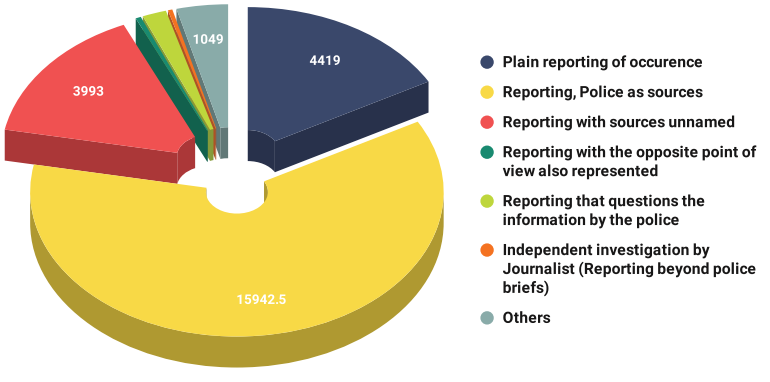
Pro-war and anti-Pakistan points of view occupied 80.75 percent of the space in this section, while anti-war and peace points of view occupied the remaining 19.25 percent.

Another data point that emerges from the Points of View Represented chart is the coverage received for the business interests in the attack-related news. It received a total of 805 cm^2 of the area. This came as reactions to the government decision to impose a war tax, as India made its biggest ever military mobilisation in its history. The news appeared first, on 8 January 2002, under the headline "War tax in offing?" The report began: "With tension building up on the border, the government is all set to give the go ahead to Finance Minister for new taxes ..." The next day, the finance minister enhanced the excise duty. The reaction from the market followed soon. On 10 January 2002, *Hindustan Times* wrote an editorial on this, titled, "War chest-thumping." The editorial argued: "Amendment of the Central Excise Act to arm the Finance Minister to collect more money (a war tax) is not a good sign to the market and highly undesirable." The same day a letter to editor, written by Sushil Mehra from Bengaluru, explained the market interest and strongly opposed the government's decision of war tax and passing on the burden of war to its business sector. The market reactions, which received coverage in media, were purely from a neoliberal position, against the government decision to introduce war tax.

Another important occupant of the space was crime stories: information from and about investigative agencies, police and intelligence agencies. This has occupied 26, 003.5 cm^2, which is 17.09 percent of

the total news. It was based on the information from the police, investigative agencies and intelligence agencies, the war mobilisation and nuclear threats followed suit. Hence, a detailed analysis of this space was found to be necessary on the nature of these crime stories.

Chart 7: Nature of the Crime Reporting



Reports with unnamed sources and police as sources together come to 19,935.5 cm^2, which is 76.66 percent of the total crime stories. Plain reporting of occurrences, which also quoted police sources, constituted another 16.99 percent. Independent investigative projects were non-existent. Reporting beyond police briefs was hardly found in the *Hindustan Times*, except in the case of two reports, which together came to 490 cm^2, which is 1.88 percent of the total crime stories. On 28 December 2001, a report titled "Mohammad, Burger: Two faces, two men?" questioned the police claim of the leader of the five gunmen killed at the Parliament, Mohammad, the same as Burger, a hijacker of Indian Airlines flight IC 814, which was hijacked to Kandahar, Afghanistan two years ago. The report, bylined Sudhi Ranjan and Sutirtho Patranobis, began: "Did Burger the hijacker of IC 814 come back as Mohammad the suicide attacker of December 13? The Delhi Police seems to think so, but no one else is convinced... A number of agencies including the CBI and RAW feel that the police's claim is premature and possibly incorrect …"

The Delhi Police Commissioner told the media few days earlier that Mohammad was Burger, from the information the police had received from Afzal's confession. Apparently, Mohammad had told Afzal that he was Burger. The news report quoted passengers of the flight who contested the police commissioner's claim. The report also carried a

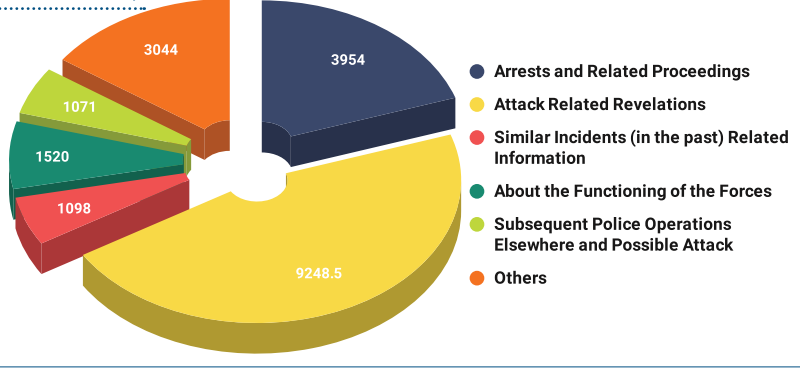
photo of Burger on one side and the deceased Mohammad's on the other side, with contradicting details:

Another report, titled "FIR short of crucial facts," dated 16 December 2001, also criticised the police investigation. However, beyond these two reports that constituted only 1.88 percent of the total crime stories, there was no critical journalism or investigation as such.

A further scrutiny of crime reporting explains the nature of messages. There are six categories to the analysis.

1. Arrests and related proceedings. These are news reports related to arrests of the accused and the early proceedings of investigation.
2. Attack-related revelation. This is the information revealed by the police to the public about the conspiracy, motives and the players behind the attack.
3. Similar incidents in the past. This is the information revealed about similar incidents in the past to draw a parallel with the attack.
4. About the functioning of the forces. This is the information about deployment of more police forces and the security measures taken to guard strategic locations, etc.
5. Subsequent police operations elsewhere. These are police operations in areas outside Delhi.
6. Others. Police warnings, raids at landlords' houses and other crime stories that do not fall in the above five categories.

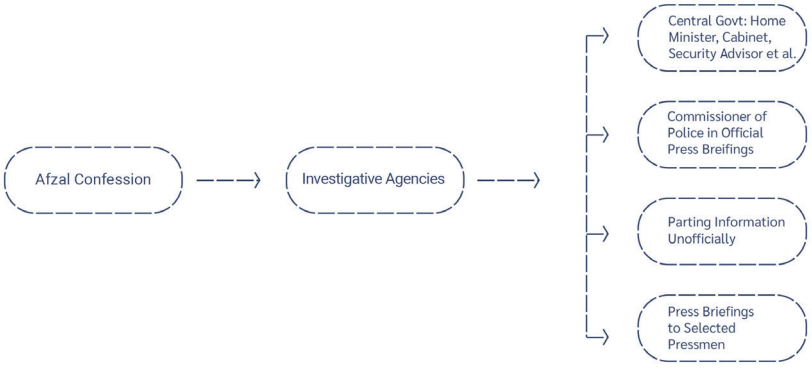
Chart 8: Split up of Crime Reporting (of both sources named as police and sources unnamed)



Out of these categories, attack-related revelations that included police leaking the details of their investigation—the conspiracy, motives, and the players behind the attack, etc.—constituted 46.39 percent of the entire crime reporting. Most of this was found, later, to not be true. Another analysis into the source of the attack-related revelations is shown in the next chart.

Out of an area of 9,248.5 cm^2, the source of information for 6,432 cm^2 (close to 70 percent of the area) is Afzal's confession. This shows a higher percentage of crime reporting based on the confessional statement of Afzal, which was fed to the media by the police from time to time. This fact was corroborated with the court records (Delhi High Court Judgment, 2003 and Supreme Court Judgement, 2005). A further explanation of this is done in the qualitative analysis part, which follows later in this chapter. Chart 9 explains how the flow of information from Afzal's confession constituted the public opinion.

Chart 9: Legally Inadmissible `Confession as News


Afzal Confession
Investigative Agencies
Central Govt: Home Minister, Cabinet, Security Advisor et al.
Commissioner of Police in Official Press Breifings
Parting Information Unofficially
Press Briefings to Selected Pressmen

Another analysis of the distribution of news reported on the four accused was also carried out. These charts (Charts 10,11,12,13,14) are about the news on the four arrested, Geelani, Afsal, Shaukat and Afsan.

Chart 10: Distribution of News Reported on the Four Arrested in the Case (Total: 3,638 CM²)

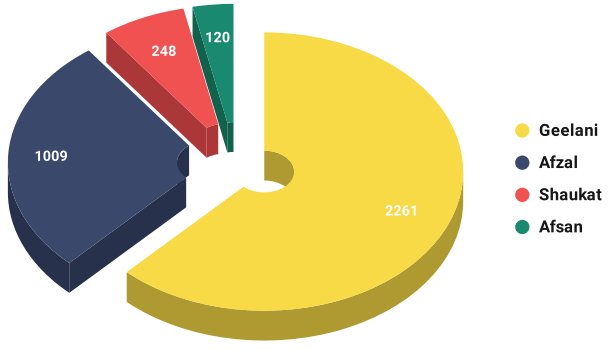


Chart 11: Geelani (Total: 2261 CM²)

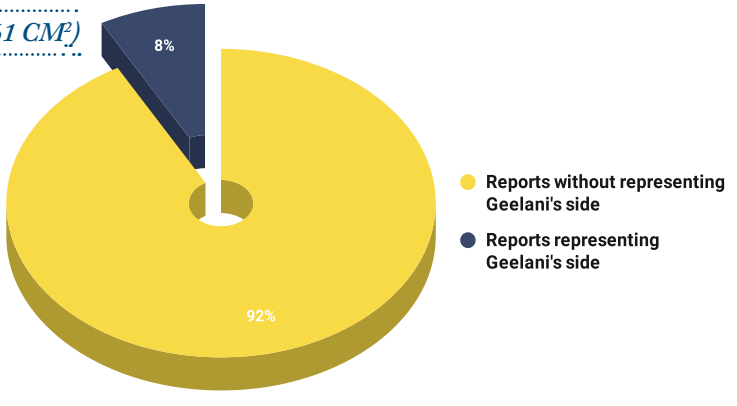


Chart 12: Afzal (Total: 1009 CM²)

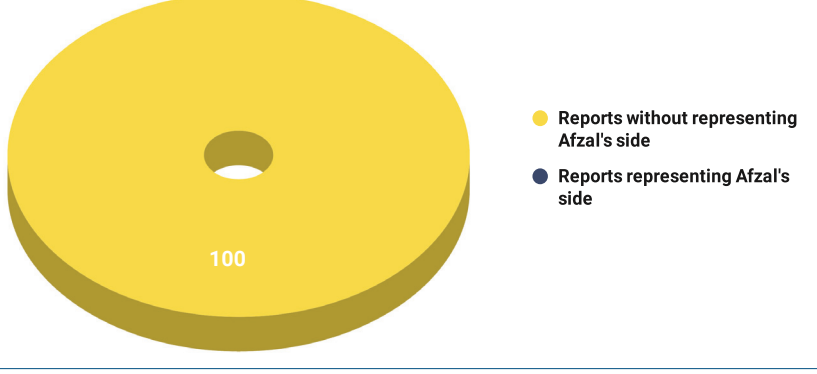


Chart 13: Shaukat (Total: 248 CM²)

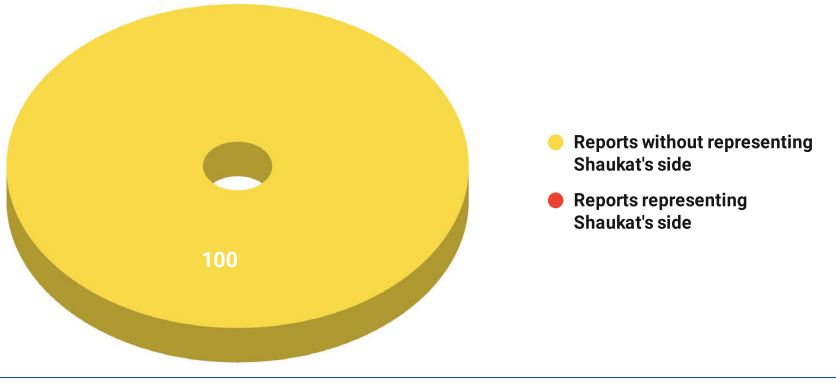
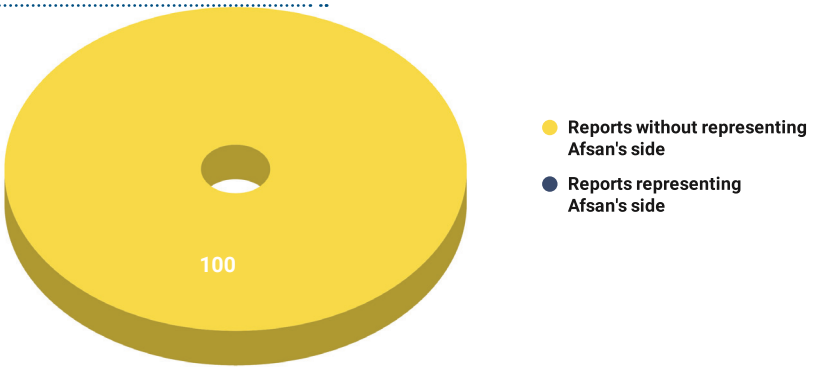


Chart 14: Afsan (Total: 120 CM²)



The above space studied has excluded a published letter to the editor, which could be considered a point of view that benefits the accused, even though the focus of the letter was regarding the misuse of POTA. The letter, titled "Reject Undemocratic POTO," written by People's Union for Democratic Rights—PUDR—and signed by Shashi Saxena, Delhi, said:

> *The People's Union for Democratic Rights expresses concern over the use of POTO against three persons arrested after the shoot out at Parliament house. The accused were initially charged under various sections of IPC relating to conspiracy, waging war against the state and murder. Later, sections 3, 4, 5, 21 and 22 of POTO were added. The reasons for this remain unstated and are a cause for concern.*

Use of POTO gives the investigating agency an advantage that is not available normally. First, it condemns the accused as "terrorist" even before the case has commenced. Also, confessions to the police and the use of electronic interceptions are admissible as evidence in the court ... In short, police need not conduct proper investigations and even shoddy work can lead to conviction ...

The accused in this case were not represented by a lawyer though one of the publicised POTO safeguards was the provision of a lawyer during the interrogation. The selective press interviews of the accused organised by the police in their custody are also curious. Did they agree to the interviews voluntarily?

Though the letter to the editor was raising a human-rights organisation's concern about a new law that could violate civil liberties, it indirectly spoke about the rights of the four accused.

Another set of analyses was also carried out to examine how public debate progressed. This was done by classifying news week-wise in the following categories and measuring their progression or regression as days went by. The news is classified in the following categories: attack, investigation, diplomacy, war talk and others. The following graph explains the result.

Distribution of News (Week-Wise)

The graph shows the nature of public debate as it progressed in the *Hindustan Times*. "Investigation" received maximum coverage in the first week with 16,749.5 cm^2 out of the week's total coverage of 48,402 cm^2, which is 34.6 percent. It was followed by news on the "Attack," with 31.9 percent and an area of 15,441 cm^2. "Diplomacy" and "War Talk" occupied 10.63 percent and 5.81 percent respectively.

In the second week the leader occupant of the first week area, "Investigation," was reduced to half with 8,134.5 cm^2 and held only 19.73 percent of the week's total of 41,211 cm^2. The "Attack" news dipped to 430 cm^2, which was only 1.04 percent. The major occupant of news in this week was "War Talk" with 14,874 cm^2 and it held 36.09 percent of the week's area. "Diplomacy" also saw a hike to 9,569 cm^2 with an area of 23.21 percent.

Out of the third week's area of 31,158 cm^2, "War Talk" occupied

21,429 cm^2 with 68.55 percent area. "Investigation," which further dipped, occupied 6.82 percent and "Diplomacy" another 6.83 percent, with 2,125 cm^2 and 2129 cm^2 of the week's area respectively. "War Talk" topped the total area in the fourth week also. With 25,821.5 cm^2, it occupied 82.22 percent of the week's area of 31,404 cm^2. "Diplomacy" and "Investigation" were reduced further to 6.57 percent and 1.02 percent respectively. The week-wise distribution of news shows that the only category that had a steady progression was "War Talk," which from the first week's area of 10.63 percent grew to 36.09 percent in the second week, and to 68.55 percent and 82.22 percent in the third and fourth weeks. "Investigation" found a steady decline from 34.6 percent to 19.73 percent, 6.82 percent and 1.02 percent in the following weeks. "Diplomacy," except for the second week, was also on the decline, and in the fourth week, there was no news relating to the act of the "Attack" at all. Individual graphs (Charts 15,16,17) show the progression and regression and explains the trend analysed above.

Chart 15: Investigation

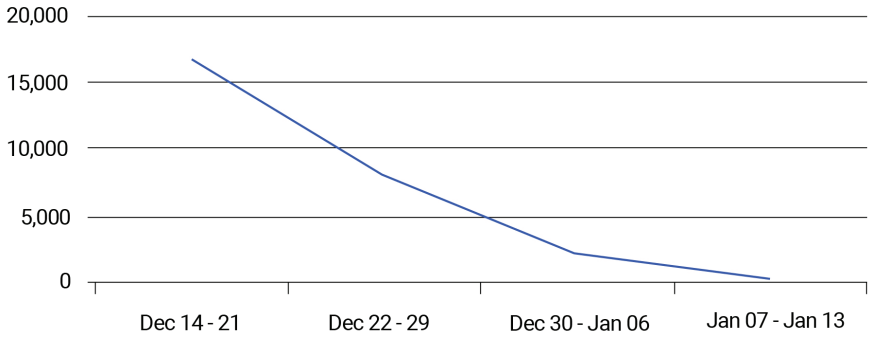


Chart 16: War Talk

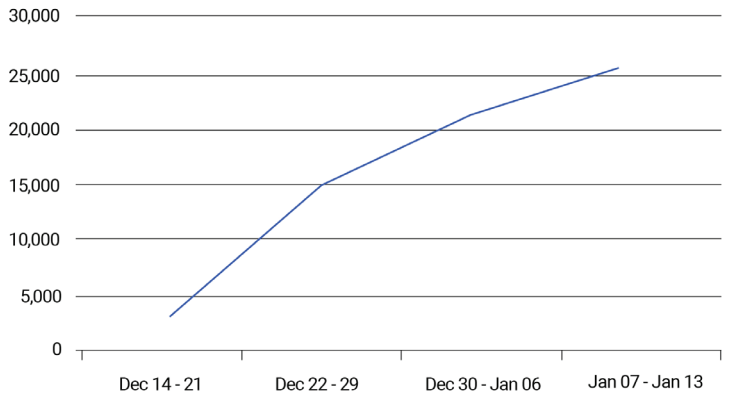
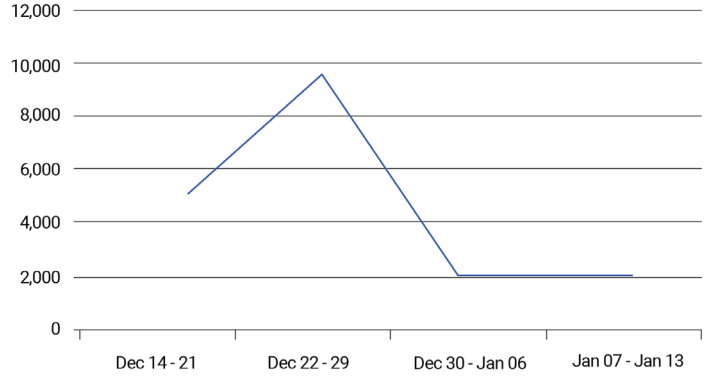


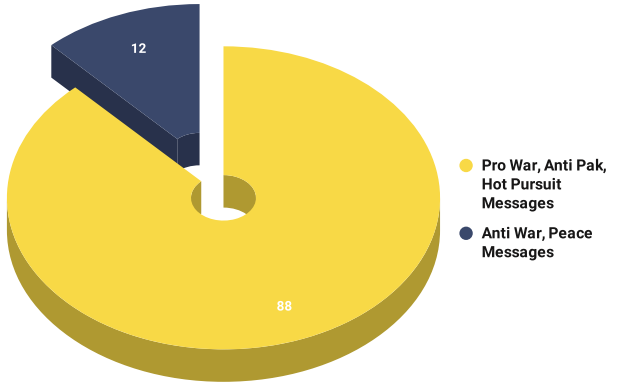
Chart 17: Diplomacy



In the category of "War Talk" retaliatory statements, war-mobilisation reports, war strategies, and analytical reports of the military strengths and weaknesses of the countries were included.

A quantitative analysis of letters to the editor was also carried out. Total letters published in 31 days were 132, out of which 69 were attack-related letters. These letters were classified into two sections according to the nature of the message; first, the anti-Pakistan, pro-war, hot pursuit responses and the other, anti-war, peace responses. The following chart shows the division of these two categories.

Chart 18: Letter to Editor; Classification Based on Nature of Messages



An overwhelming 88 percent of letters (61 out of 69 letters) had messages that were pro-war and anti-Pakistan, and spoke of India being soft on terror and India as the victim of terror. Within days, letters that demonstrated growing impatience at why India was not striking at Pakistan appeared in larger numbers. Most of them criticised the government for going soft against Pakistan and the Cabinet's decision to put hot pursuit on hold and to surrender to the US pressure to restrain.

"Free PoK (Pak Occupied Kashmir)"; "All is not Well Mr. Powell (Colin Powell was the US Secretary of State)"; "Lay off Kashmir"; "No more Evidence Needed to Strike Pakistan"; "To Save India from Terrorism Attack Pak Immediately" etc. were the headlines of some of the letters published in the second week in *Hindustan Times*.

In the third week, letters with more spirited arguments were found. A letter written by Raghu Nath Singh from Jaipur, on 29 December 2001, concluded: "By going to war to eliminate the root of the problem, the government will be only discharging its duty. This is exactly what Lord Krishna told Arjuna."

In the following days many warning letters were written to the editor. "Time is running out to strike Pakistan" (by Asoka Kumar Addya, Puri). "Pakistan is funding International Jehad, Hence Pakistan is a Rogue State" (by Mahesh Inder Sharma, Delhi). "Undue Publicity for the Accused and Stop Publishing News on Them in Newspapers" (by DP Ganguly, Delhi). "New Year Prayer, Wisdom be Given to Musharraf" (by S. Mohan Budpraja, Delhi). "India Shouldn't Wait for US and Fight the Battle against Pakistan Alone" (by Nihar Ran-

jan, Delhi). In reply to the US demand to produce evidence against Pakistan, Samir Banerjee, via e-mail, wrote on 10 January 2002: "Did US produce evidence of Sept 11 to strike at Taliban? You didn't need evidence then. Now we also don't need evidence. India should strike Pakistan immediately..."; "Enough is Enough, Strike Immediately" by Vasant Chauhan, Gurgaon, on 13 January 2002 were some of the letters in the last week analysed.

The first letter to the editor that asked the government not to rush to taking hard decisions came on 21 December 2001. It was written by a Delhi-based NGO, the Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace. Titled "Need for Sober Response," the letter was signed by academics and journalists like Achin Vanaik, Prabir Purkayastha, and Praful Bidwai.

The first letter from a reader, with a message of peace came from K. Mohan, Delhi, on Dec 24, 2001. Titled "Big Joke," he said it was a "big joke" that the government (he referred to home minister LK Advani) continued with his war talk. Mohan ridiculed Advani's legitimacy of claiming India "secular, democratic, and steadily progressing" while the latter was an "RSS man." Mohan referred to a story appeared on *Hindustan Times* from Jagadalpur—"Poverty drives six of family members to suicide (of Dec 18, 2001)"—and said there was nothing to be proud of as an Indian at the moment. Instead of war talk we should face poverty issues, he said. The letter read: "Yes, people are taking their lives. Penury, malnutrition, and starvation are killing people. Some 40 percent of Indians live below the poverty line. Unemployment is growing, while large sections of children are denied schooling for want of resources..." Mohan said these were the issues government should concentrate instead of leading the country to a war. Other letters with messages of peace and restraint included one written against POTO by SS Agarwal, Delhi, on 26 December 2001 and "Don't Kill Each Other" by Lalu Hanuman, London, on 2 January 2002. Another letter titled "Rein in the Hawks,", written by TK Govindankutty, Sahibabad, said on 4 January 2002: "Vajpayee and Musharraf should rein in the hawks in their camps and see things from the perspective of the millions of poor, unemployed people in India and Pakistan."

Rahul, from Delhi, wrote a letter on 6 January 2002, titled "A Borderline Existence": "If the border people are saying war should be avoided the political class should sit up and listen to it. It is easy to sit

in air-conditioned chambers and talk of war. It would be advisable both India and Pakistan to concentrate on developmental issues instead of a conflict neither needs." S Ruhi wrote a letter with similar message on 7 January 2002, was titled, "War Hysteria Won't Help".

Another letter written by M. Shahid Kamal, from Aligarh, published on 9 January 2002, titled "One Man's Anti National," said: "When the LeT threatens to blow up Taj Mahal we call them anti-national. Not long ago when hundreds of Bajrang Dal activists entered the Taj Mahal Complex with destructive objects, the Supreme Court had to intervene. But Bajrang Dal is not seen as an anti national organisation. What a paradox."

The quantitative analysis of the letters to the editor reveals two things: first, the general trend in news coverage has also resembled the letters to the editor. In news, 80.75 percentage was pro-war/anti-Pakistan, while in letters to the editor, 88 percentage was pro-war/anti-Pakistan, while the remaining area in both were anti-war/peace points of views. Second, between the news and letters to the editor, there was a week-to-week correlation—the trend of investigation and diplomacy fading away as the weeks passed by, while war-talk gained more coverage.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

"What was the nature of the news published in this conflict?"; "How was the quality of journalism vis-à-vis the principles of journalism in reporting?" etc. are some of the questions that arise in this section of the qualitative content analysis of the media coverage.

Confession as news

The quantitative analysis has shown that a significant part (70 percent of the crime news) is from the confessions of Mohd Afzal in police custody (Chart 5 J). When this case was heard at the Supreme Court, the Court set aside the confessions, finding them "not good law."[7] "In the court of law, confessional statements are presented by the prosecution as an easy substitute for hard evidence. And it was precisely because of this that criminal jurisprudence, the world over, consider confession-

al statements not very good pieces of evidence in administering justice"—Jethmalani articulated in the Supreme Court Arguments, 2005. Moreover, the law also recognised that confessions were often taken after the accused had been tortured, and without following due course of procedures, and hence were unacceptable. These arguments led to the Supreme Court dismissing Afzal's confessions as evidence in the judgement of the Parliament attack case. While Afzal's confessions were rejected at the court of law, most of the media coverage on this case was based on the same document. Starting from Afzal's background, to his involvement, details of the masterminds of the attack, and the profiles of the attackers, all these narratives were built on the basis of Afzal's confession.

The following section (bulleted in linear order) studies excerpts from Afzal's confessional statement and compares it with the media coverage, to understand which portions were played up and which were ignored. (The confession was recorded by Ashok Chand, DCP, Special Cell, Delhi Police, at 7.10 p.m. on 21 December 2001 and accessed from the court records):

- "In the year 1989-90 on the motivation of Yasin Malik and Hamid Shah of Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) I joined their militant outfit."
- Interestingly, this information in the first paragraph of Afzal's statement was underplayed in the media coverage. Instead, reports linking him to Jaish-e- Muhammad, another group often identified as a banned terrorist outfit, were in the news throughout the period of analysis. JKLF was not a banned organisation in 2001, and rather enjoyed larger acceptance compared to organisations like Jaish-e-Muhammad. But, from the initial days of the coverage itself, stories regarding Afzal started with a prefix to his name "Jaish-e-Muhammad terrorist," "Jaish-e-Muhammad militant," "Jaish-e-Muhammad member," "Jaish-e-Muhammad activist" (*Hindustan Times*, December 2001; *Times of India*, December 2001; *The Indian Express*, December 2001).
- In 2005, the Supreme Court said there was no evidence to prove that Afzal belonged to any terrorist organisation. But, even after that, when Afzal's clemency petition to the presi-

dent of India was in the news, he was again identified with "Jaish- e-Muhammad" (*Hindustan Times*, October 2006; *Times of India*, October 2006; *The Indian Express*, October 2006). Here the media used a part of Afzal's confession—the fact that he was a surrendered militant—but attributed a wrong organisation, one that was more militant.

- "That I went to Srinagar and surrendered before Border Security Force (BSF)"
- This information also did not come up in the media coverage in the first five years of the case. It was only in 2006, when the human-rights activists began campaigning for clemency for Afzal, that this information came out in media that he was only a former militant, who surrendered to the BSF.
- "That I completed my graduation from Delhi University in 1993-94"
- There was no report on the fact that after Afzal's return from Pak-Occupied Kashmir (PoK), he had a three-year long life in Delhi as a graduate student in Delhi University. Except for the brief and passing mention, this information did not incite any reports tracing his days at Delhi University, tracking his classmates, teachers or investigating what happened in the life of a surrendered militant between the days in college and the December 13 attack.
- "…in Delhi I earned my livelihood by working in various private companies and also doing private tuitions up to 1996. In 1996 I returned back to Sopore (Kashmir) where I started working as commission agent for medical and surgical goods."
- Information like this also did not find any space in the media coverage.
- [sic] "At a shop in Lal Chowk, Srinagar, I came across one Tariq who introduced himself as a doctor residing in Anantnag district. We had a discussion for half an hour regarding the current state of affairs and also discussed about militancy in Kashmir. Two months after the first meeting with Tariq when I had gone to offer Namaz at Bataraloo masjid

> in Srinagar, Tariq met and disclosed he was an active militant of Jaish-e-Muhammad outfit. He also motivated me to join the jehad for liberation of Kashmir and for the cause of Muslim Qaum and also assured me of financial support. When I expressed my willingness to work for Jaish-e-Muhammad, Tariq further introduced me to one Ghazi Baba who is the Supreme Commander of Jaish-e-Muhammad in Kashmir. The camp of Ghasi Baba in Kashmir considered of about 60 heavily armed militants of Jaish-e-Muhammad. Ghazi Baba was also equipped with wireless sets, satellite phone and other means of communication. Ghazi Baba further motivated me and also gave me audiocassette and literature containing provocative preaching of Maulana Masood Azhar. I was directed to contact Tariq after 6 weeks. At the appointed time I met Tariq who again took me to Ghazi Baba at his training camp who instructed me that he has been told by Maulana Masood Azhar that we must carry out actions on important installations of Indian nation, like the Indian Parliament and US and UK Embassies as our actions in Kashmir has not led to the desired results. He told me that the action in Delhi would be a joint action of Jaish-e-Muhammad and Lashkar-e-Tayyaba."

It was this part of Afzal's confession—which he later said was taken after torture in police custody, and the courts later set aside the confession as not legally admissible—that received maximum coverage in the media. The media always said the attack on the Parliament was carried out by a joint operation of Jaish-e-Muhammad and Lashkar-e-Tayyaba, as revealed in the confessional statement of Afzal.

The only piece that questioned this theory of two organisations carrying the operation was by senior journalist Praful Bidwai, in his column in the *Hindustan Times* on 20 December 2001. He said:

> *Following the official statements on the culprits and suspects in the gristly Parliament House attack, the public must ask two basic questions: whodunit? And cui bono (who benefits?). The honest answer to the first is: we still don't know; clinching evidence is yet to emerge. The indirect, circumstantial, evidence available generally points to some Pakistan based Kashmiri tanzeem*

(militant group/movement). But that is long distance away from rigorously logical, legally tenable, proof.

The official case has more holes than a piece of gruyere cheese. Its first statement (Jaswant Singh's) held the Lashkar-e-Tayyeba (LeT) responsible for Dec 13. But the Delhi police investigation, the only one to unearth specific clues, named the Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM). Home Minister Advani lifted the police account, but for good measure, also blamed the LeT. Now anyone who knows any- thing about Kashmir knows the two are disparate, competing, organisation, with distinc- tly different genealogies and ideological affiliations.

Other than this opinion piece, no report or column questioned the police information of a joint operation, which originally was surfaced from Afzal's confession. (In an interview with this researcher, Praful Bidwai said such bold reporting at that difficult time cost him the column in *Hindustan Times*[8] Bidwai had to discontinue his column in 2002 under pressure. The question of who conducted the attack was answered in the same voice in all the newspapers. The *Times of India* on December 17, 2001, reported: "Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad, two extremist outfits, masterminded the attack on Parliament on the instructions of Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI)." *The Hindu* reported: "The conspiracy to carry out a "fidayeen" attack on the Parliament House on December 13 was a joint operation planned by the Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) and the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) at the behest of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI)." *Hindustan Times*, *The Telegraph*, *Pioneer*, *Statesman* etc. had the same news as a lead report.

All these newspapers relied upon the Delhi Commissioner's press conference the day before. And the Delhi Police Commissioner got the information from Mohd Afzal's confession. There was no other evidence to prove that the attack on Parliament was carried out by organisations like Jaish-e-Muhammad or Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (High Court Case File, 2003 and Supreme Court Case Files, 2006). When the Court set aside Afzal's confession, in effect, there was no document left to substantiate the police argument. The media coverage of the confession became important for the police since there was no hard evidence to substantiate their arguments on who attacked the Parliament. Many

called this practice of journalism a "media trial" since prejudiced the minds of the public, thus making it impossible for a fair hearing in a court of law.[9,10]

Unsubstantiated Information/Lies as News

While the confession of Afzal in police custody was the main source of information on the attack, the operation, the attackers, motives, etc., a good number of unsubstantiated information or lies were published in media, especially on the involvement of SAR Geelani, a lecturer in Delhi University. From the beginning, he was described with adjectives such as, "the educated mastermind" and "the intellectual kingpin." Some of the unsubstantiated information/lies in media, verified against court records, are numbered below.

- The *Hindustan Times*, 16 December 2001, titled "Case Cracked: Jaish behind attack," bylined Neeta Sharma from New Delhi and Arun Joshi from Jammu, reported:

  A Zakir Hussain (Evening) College Lecturer Abdul Ahmed Jelani [sic] is detained after a call from the militants' mobile phone is traced to his mobile. Terrorists spoke to him before the attack and the lecturer made a phone call to Pakistan after the strike.

  The telephone call records of three months prior to his arrest, accessed from the court records, show there was no call (incoming/outgoing) between Geelani's number or any of the militants' numbers. "No records show that Geelani received or made any calls from or to the militants or Pakistan. It was a lie that such news appeared in media. It was journalistic imagination running amok," Attorney Jethmalani argued in the High Court in defence of Geelani's innocence.[11]

- On 17 December 2001, a six-column header in *The Times of India* titled, "DU lecturer was terror plan hub" began:

  The attack on parliament on December 13 was a joint operation of the Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) and Lashkar-e- Taiba (LeT) terrorist groups, in which a Delhi University lecturer, Syed A.R. Gilani was one of the key facilitators in Delhi, Police

Commissioner Ajay Raj Sharma said on Sunday.

The media coverage in the initial days tried to link SAR Geelani to militant organisations like JeM or LeT, as their "facilitator," "don," or "intellectual mastermind." But none of the 80 prosecution witnesses (PWs) had any evidence to that effect.[12]

- The *Hindustan Times* on 21 December 2001, titled "Terror suspect frequent visitor to Pak mission" and bylined Swati Chaturvedi, said:

  During the interrogation, Gilani has admitted that he had made frequent calls to Pakistan and was in touch with relatives in London who were actively involved in funding militancy in Jammu and Kashmir.

  Geelani did not make any confessional statements in the interrogation and there are no documents in the court records that linked him to London or Pakistan.

- The *Hindustan Times*, on 21 December 2001, titled "Terror suspect frequent visitor to Pak mission" said: "Geelani said that he had been provided with funds by some members of the Jaish and told to buy two flats that could be used in militant operations."

  Again, this news in the *Hindustan Times* is unsubstantiated and there is no evidence.

- On 17 December 2001, *The Hindu* also carried a story "Varsity Don Guided Fidayeen." The report did not quote any sources and said:

  Three of the four persons who supplied logistic support and provided a safe haven to the five 'fidayeen' to mount a daring attack on parliament here on December 13, studied at the prestigious Delhi University; one even turned out to be a highly qualified lecturer.

  Sayed Abdul Rehman Geelani, an Arabic lecturer at the Zakir Hussain College (Evening) was arrested by the special cell of the Delhi Police for his role in the conspiracy hatched by Pakistan-based terrorist outfits, Jaish-e-Mohammad, and Lash-

kar-e-Taiba…

During the interrogation, Geelani disclosed that he was in the know of the conspiracy since the day the 'Fidayeen' attack was planned. Sources said, intelligence agencies had been tapping Geelani's phone for sometime as he had contacts in Pakistan. Geelani revealed that he became part of the conspiracy due to his ideological leanings. He was closely related to the main Jaish-e-Mohammad co-coordinator in Delhi, Mohammad Afzal and his cousin, Shaukat Hussain Guru, who have also been arrested. He also knew the terrorists who came to the capital to execute the plan.

There was no evidence in the court records to substantiate the news in *The Hindu*. Nandita Haksar, a lawyer in Geelani's defence team, said at a public meeting in 2003 that the information of the above effect was "complete lies and concocted by media and police."

- The Hindi daily *Rashtriya Sahara* carried a report on 18 December 2001, titled "Rajdhani Mein Ek Nahin Kai Thikane The Geelani Ke"—Geelani had not one, but many places to reside in the capital. The translated report read:

  One of the conspirators in the attempt to attack Parliament House is Delhi, University teacher Abdul Sayeed Rahman Geelani, who has many places of residence in Delhi. Pitampura, Mukherjee Nagar, Transit Hostel of Delhi University, are the places from where he carried out his activities. According to Zakir Hussain College records, there is mention of Pitampura as his residence. He stayed aloof from his colleagues and spent most of his time in the University.

  Referring to this lie that appeared in Rashtriya Sahara, SAR Geelani's brother and journalist, Bismillah Geelani wrote thus in 2006[13]:

  The allegation here seems to be that Geelani spent more time on the campus than in the college. I wish the journalist had checked his facts because he would have found out that Geelani was teaching MA classes in the campus and also working in the University library since he was in the midst of finishing his

doctoral thesis…

As for Geelani having more than one place to live, I wish that had been true—it would have saved us all a lot of time looking for a rented place after he was arrested. Even after his acquittal, at least 35 landlords refused their houses to us on rent. I can only say that the journalist was just trying to mystify Geelani's image and feed the public sensational titbits.

Haksar, in 2003, further said: "If the lies media told about Geelani owning property in Delhi were correct, why did he stay in a single-room rented house in a lower middle class suburban area in North Delhi. Media portrayed him as affluent and educated-ideologue of a terrorist act. That is not just misinformation in reporting, but a big crime of publishing lies."

- The Hindi edition of *Rashtriya Sahara* carried another report on 18 December 2001, titled "Aligarh se England tak Chhatron mein aatankwad ke beej bo raha tha Geelani"—Geelani was sowing the seeds of terrorism among students from Aligarh to England. The subtitle beneath this headline was: "Jaish-e-Mohammad ne sonpa tha Bharat mein bauddhik aatankwad ki jadein jamaane ka jimma"—Jaish-e-Mohammad had entrusted him with the responsibility of spreading intellectual terrorism in India). The translation of the report, bylined Sujit Thakur, was to this effect:

  Zakir Hussain College lecturer Abdul Rahman Geelani involved in the conspiracy to attack Parliament wanted to lay the foundation of intellectual terrorism in India. According to sources, Jaish-e-Mohammad had a project to win support for intellectual terrorism. Geelani was given the responsibility to implement this project. After research and teaching, Geelani spent time in colleges, universities and other educational institutions, sowing seeds of intellectual terrorism among students and teachers. He tried to contact teachers and students of Aligarh Muslim University, London School of Economics, and other Indian universities and colleges.

  According to sources and information collected by investigation agencies, Geelani has made a statement to the police that he was

an agent of Jaish-e-Mohammad for a long time. The leader of Jaish-e-Mohammad visited AMU in 1997 and contacted some students. After this meeting, Geelani went to AMU and met other students. It was because of Geelani's articulation, style of working and sound planning that in 2000 Jaish-e-Mohammad gave him the responsibility of spreading the intellectual terrorism. According to sources, Geelani met terrorist Ahmad Umar Sayed Sheikh and asked him for contacts amongst students of the London School of Economics who could help him spread intellectual terrorism. The surprising thing is that Ahmad Umar Sayed Sheikh is the same terrorist escaped with Azhar Masood after the hijacking of IC-814. Umar Sayed was a student of the London School of Economics and it was from there he took to the path of terrorism.

Bismillah Geelani recollects his reaction that day, of calling up the newspaper after reading "a completely false and highly propagandist" report about his brother:

That day police had released me, my brother's wife, and their two children, and we were returning from the Lodi Road Police Station to our home. I bought some newspapers on the way. I was furious to see the Rashtriya Sahara report, which had string of lies. I phoned the [Rashtriya] Sahara *office and demanded to speak to the Editor.*

I was told that I was speaking to the editor himself. So, making a reference to the Sahara motto 'Duty, Patriotism and Altruism', I asked him which of these three was involved in this kind of journalism. He asked me who I was. I introduced myself and demanded an explanation. I said, "You haven't bothered to quote any source but as an interested party I have a right to know where you got your information from? There was silence. Then I gave him a short lecture on journalistic ethics and also threatened to sue him. He then said the editor was not there and that he would tell him about my complaint when he returned. He tried to sound sympathetic by saying that it was really serious and he would take it up with the editor and let me know. Then he asked for my phone number, but by then I was so furious that I just slammed the receiver down.

In the writings and arguments of writers and lawyers, they later argued that the police used media to construct the image of the terrorist.[14]

Geelani, who was born in Baramullah in Kashmir, studied the Koran and Arabic from a 'madrasa' at Muzaffarnagar in Uttar Pradesh, graduated from Lucknow in Arabic language and a Masters and an M.Phil in Arabic literature from Delhi University Geelani had all that was needed for an educated Muslim terrorist and the crime reporters liked reporting all that," said Ajay Panikker, who was a crime reporter for The Indian Express *in 2001 (Panikker, 2007).*

Facts that did not interest the media:

While the media relied heavily on police sources for information, it did not create reports from the readily available facts—statements of 88 prosecution witnesses (PWs), court records, press statements by the defence team of the accused, university teachers who came out in defence of SAR Geelani, etc. From the court records, pamphlets and campaign materials of the Society for the Protection of Detainees and Prisoners' Rights—SPDPR—these are some of the main facts that did not make news in the coverage of the conflict studied:

- Afzal was forced to accept the charges while his family was kidnapped and kept in STF custody (SPDPR pamphlet, 2006, pg: 12 and Supreme Court Case File, 2005).
- The fact that Afzal was forced into making a media confession, which the Courts found was illegal (SPDPR pamphlet, 2006, pg: 12 and Supreme Court Case File, 2005).
- Afzal did not have a lawyer to defend his case and was convicted without one in the lower courts (SPDPR pamphlet, 2006, pg: 12).
- The fact that right to a lawyer is a fundamental right in India and when Afzal named four lawyers at the crucial trial stage, none of their services were made available for him (SPDPR pamphlet, 2006, pg: 12 and Supreme Court Case File, 2005).

- Police carried out a shoddy and illegal investigation and Court was highly critical of police for forging evidences (SPDPR pamphlet, 2006, pg: 12 and High Court Case File, 2003).
- The fact that the police officers who investigated the case was corrupt and the chief investigating officer, ACP Rajbir Singh has been removed from the Special Cell of Delhi Police for facing serious corruption charges (SPDPR pamphlet, 2006, pg: 12).
- The personal torture that Afzal was subjected to was completely ignored. Why didn't the newspapers report on the hidden camera interview conducted by CNN-IBN of Davinder Singh, a police officer in STF, confessing that he poured petrol in Afzal's anus and tortured him? (SPDPR pamphlet, 2006, pg: 12 and Roy, 2006).
- The fact that Afzal brought Mohammad, the leader of the 5 men who attacked the Parliament, in the order of STF officers in Kashmir was ignored in the coverage (SPDPR pamphlet, 2006, pg: 12).
- The media chose to ignore the context, the political violence of Kashmir that Afzal grew up with (Haksar, 2006).
- The fact that none of the prosecution witnesses ever alleged that Afzal was in any way associated or belonged to any terrorist organisation (SPDPR pamphlet, 2006, pg: 12).
- Supreme Court categorically stated that there was no evidence to show that Mohammad Afzal was a member of any banned organization was ignored in the coverage (SPDPR pamphlet, 2006, pg: 12).

While the Supreme Court acquitted Afzal of most of the serious charges, it still awarded the death penalty to him. In justifying the punishment, the judgment said that it was doing so "to satisfy the collecting conscience of the nation" (Supreme Court Judgement, 2006, paragraph: 34). This raises the question, how did the "collective conscience of the nation" get formed? Media definitely was the main channel by which the public opinion was shaped in this national security conflict.

In the conflict studied, the police had a powerful control on infor-

mation and they manipulated the media well. From the methodological freedom of participatory research, this researcher, then a city reporter in Delhi, would like to contribute here that journalists had developed a dependency on the police for information and the latter understood it well and used it cleverly.

A good example of police manipulation of media coverage is documented in the court records when Shams Tahir Khan, principal correspondent with the Hindi TV channel *Aaj Tak*, was summoned by the Special POTA Trial Court to depose as a defence witness to verify Afzal's claim that his media confessions were organised by police. When Afzal was being interviewed before the select TV journalists, Tahir Khan of Aaj Tak, asked him about Geelani's involvement in the case. Afzal told them Geelani was innocent. Immediately, ACP Rajbir Singh shouted at Afzal in front of the full media, including TV cameras, saying he had instructed Afzal not to say anything about Geelani. Shams Tahir Khan elaborated on this incident in the court, saying the police officer asked all the journalists in the room to edit out portions where Afzal talks about Geelani's innocence. He said: "Rajbir had requested that I should remove the lines stated by Afzal about Geelani … So, when this interview was telecast on December 20, 2001, at 5 p.m., that line was removed."[15]

Shams Tahir Khan acknowledged in the court that he had to let himself to be manipulated by police "because we are dependent on the police for information … Rajbir Singh is a very good source in the Delhi Police's Special Cell"—in *The Hindu*.[16] This deposition of a journalist in court explains the extent of the influence enjoyed by the police over the media coverage of the national security conflict.

Later in the Delhi High Court, agreeing with the arguments of the defence lawyer, Ram Jethmalani, the Court took a strong objection to broadcasting Afzal's interview. Jethmalani told the High Court that broadcasting a confession obtained under duress in police custody was "one of the meanest and dirtiest tricks of the police in the investigation of the case … When an accused is produced before TV cameras confessing his involvement in crime a contempt is created against him in the public mind, it becomes difficult to amend the statement later."[17] Commenting on the lawyer's assertion, Justice Usha Mehra said that the Division Bench agreed with the view of the senior advocate and that the media should not have been allowed to interview the accused

in police custody.[18]

The extent of police manipulating media to publicise information, which the courts later found "inadmissible", "false" or "bad law" did not raise questions about journalistic ethics, objectivity or accuracy in the public, except in three instances.

CHALLENGING THE JOURNALISTIC PRACTICES

Even though there was no larger debate on journalistic ethics and the extent of influence police enjoyed over media, there were three instances when the victims of such lopsided media coverage challenged them.

Case against Zee TV film on December 13

A year after the attack on the Parliament House, Hindi news channel *Zee TV* showed a "docudrama," titled "December 13 Parliament Attack." The channel aired the tape several times after it won an order from the Supreme Court that showing the film would not prejudice the judges. Before the case reached the Supreme Court, the film was challenged by two of the accused, Afsan (Navjot) and SAR Geelani, in the Delhi High Court and won a stay order when the court found the film was biased and could influence public opinion. But Supreme Court set aside the High Court order.

The channel promoted the film with advertisements on newspapers. "December 13 Parliament Attack" claimed to be not merely a film but "Haqeeqat"—reality. The commentary began with the following statement: "Khabar ko naye andaz me pesh karanewali Zee TV ki film December 13 16 din me banayi gayi. Bharat ke itihas ka ek naya panaa hai.—"December 13" was made in 16 days and it has presented news in a totally new way, making it first in the history of Indian media.

The film started with the following statement, written in Hindi: "*Yeh film Dilli police ke special branch ki charge sheet per adharit hai. Ghatana samjhane ke liye kuchh kalakaron ka sahara liya gaya hai. Lekin ghatana-kram ko vastikvata ko puri terah barkay gaya hai*"— This film is based on the charge sheet filed by the Delhi Police's Special Branch. In order to explain the incident, help of some artists have been taken. However, the event has been fully represented with facts.

However, one of the accused, SAR Geelani, challenged the Zee

TV film through his lawyer Nikhil Nayar, in a Special Leave Petition (Criminal) NO.5464 OF 2002: "The impugned film is not based on the chargesheet but on a totally fabricated and false account of the chargesheet. The film goes well beyond in making false allegations against the Respondent No.2 in the case, (SAR Geelani) that even the police did not do in the chargesheet or during the trial" (Counter Affidavit, 2002).

Paragraph 7 of the Counter Affidavit (2002) said:

1. The patent inaccuracies and deviations from the charge sheet are evident from the following scenes in the film. In the said film, Respondent No.2 is called Syed Ahmed Jilani and is mentioned in the following scenes:
2. The commentary of the film states that the respondent No.2 who is a teacher in Zakir Hussain College helped Shaukat, Respondent No. 3 herein, at the time of his wedding and it was at that time that he made "good friends" with Afzal, Respondent No. 4 herein. Respondent No.2 states that these facts are neither true nor are they mentioned in the charge sheet.
3. The next comment is that the Respondent No.2 had good contacts with Kashmiri militants and was a part of their think tank. This has never been an allegation against the Respondent No.2 and it is not even alleged in the charge sheet or by any of the 80 Prosecution witnesses who were produced before the Sessions Court.
4. The next scene in which the Respondent No.2 is shown is in Shaukat's house at 1021, Mukherjee Nagar. In that scene, Afzal asks Respondent No.2 *"Jilani Saheb, ek baaat bataye. In dinon mai Kashmir mai kuchh ho nahi raha hai."* (Gilani saheb, please tell us why there is nothing happening in Kashmir these days.) Respondent No.2 is depicted as replying that the reason is that Shaukat is selling apples and Afzal who has received training is roaming the streets. Thereafter Respondent No.2 is shown as saying *"Kashmir alag hai"* (Kashmir is different). The three actors are seen drinking tea and the commentator states that this kind of discussion took place often. Respondent No.2 submits

that there is no such allegation made in the charge sheet and these are mere conjectures from the fertile minds of irresponsible journalists. Respondent No.2 submits that no such discussions took place and the Respondent No.2 has never been directly or indirectly a part of such discussions with the co-accused or anyone.

5. Respondent No.2 is depicted having tea in Shaukat's house where he is being introduced to a deceased terrorist by Afzal on December 6, 2001. The scene shows Afzal introducing Jilani as a man who knows every nook and corner of Delhi. (*Delhi ke chape-chape se vakif hai*). This is a scene is a figment of the imagination of the *ZEE* television journalists and is in violation of not only journalistic ethics but is highly defamatory. Respondent No.2 neither met nor talked to any one of the deceased terrorists who attacked the Parliament. It is not even an allegation made in the chargesheet or by any of the 80 Prosecution witnesses, which included senior members of the Special branch of the Delhi Police. This scene is a deliberate attempt to defame Respondent No.2 and create prejudice in the minds of the public.
6. At the end of the film there are shots of Respondent No.2 in police custody, thus, linking the real man to the depictions made by the actor."

With the acquittal of SAR Geelani in 2005 from all charges of conspiracy, waging war against terrorism and other serious charges under IPC and POTA, it was later proved that he had no role in the terrorist attack. But a movie that called itself "*Haqeeqat*" –Reality, that claimed to have been "presenting news in a new way," indeed ended up broadcasting false information in the name of news and reality. However, when the Supreme Court heard the SLP in 2002, it came to the conclusion that the film would not influence the public and allowed the channel to broadcast it.

Before the film was first broadcast on 18 December 2002, a premiere screening took place for Prime Minister AB Vajpayee and Home Minister LK Advani. Advani praised the film as an excellent example of investigative journalism and congratulated the channel for its "meticulous and thorough production."[19] The film, which relayed and re-presented

news, was itself news on the *Zee News* channel, and its making was featured as a lead story on the *Zee News* network.

The Supreme Court was told (Counter Affidavit, 2002): "It is respectfully submitted, that the film is a gross exaggeration and misrepresentation of facts and does not conform to any standards of journalistic ethics. Journalistic ethics, as delineated by the Press Council of India, require, at the very least, an adherence to the principles of accuracy and fairness, pre-publication verification, a caution against defamatory writings and to eschew suggestion of guilt by association or from conjecturing the non-existent. … a newspaper shall not publish or comment on evidence collected after the accused is arrested and charged and the court is seized of the case; nor should they reveal, comment upon or evaluate a confession allegedly made by the accused. It is respectfully submitted that these norms which have been prescribed by the Press Council of India must apply, in principle, equally to the broadcasting media. If the Freedom of Press which has been held to be implicit in the Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution, is subject to the aforesaid restrictions in the case of the print media there is no rationale whatsoever for the broadcasting media to be treated differently." (Counter Affidavit, 2002: Paragraph: 8).

The argument against the film, that it would badly influence public opinion and harm the fundamental rights of respondents for a fair trial, was constructed referring to judgments in similar cases. The observation of Viscount Dilhorne in Attorney General Vs. British Broadcasting Corporation [(1980) 3 All England Report 161 at 163-164] were apposite:

> *It is sometimes asserted that no judge will be influenced in his judgment by anything said by the media and consequently that the need to prevent the publication of matter prejudicial to the hearing of a case only exists where the decision rests with laymen. This claim to judicial superiority over human frailty is one that I find some difficulty in accepting. Every holder of judicial office does his utmost not to let his mind be affected by what he has seen or heard or read outside the court and he will not knowingly let himself be influenced in any way by the media, nor in my view will any layman experienced in the discharge of judicial duties. Nevertheless, it should, I think, be recognized*

that a man may not be able to put that which he has seen, heard or read entirely out of his mind and that he may be subconsciously affected by it. As Lord Denning MR said, the stream of justice must be kept clean and pure. It is the law, and it remains the law until it is changed by parliament, that the publication of matter likely to prejudice the hearing of a case before a court of law will constitute a contempt of court punishable by fine or imprisonment or both.

But the Supreme Court felt the opposite. It allowed the broadcast in 2002. However, in 2005, in the final judgment on the Parliament attack case, Supreme Court set aside the confession of Mohd Afzal, which was the basis on which police made the chargesheet, after it was found to be bad law. But in 2002, when the case on broadcasting *Zee News* film was heard, the Supreme Court did not find any objection to the matter as raised by the respondents. Nevertheless, this was the first instance in this case when the fairness and accuracy of media reporting was challenged in the court.

Defamatory case against the Hindustan Times

Six months after his arrest, SAR Geelani initiated a defamatory case against the *Hindustan Times*, seeking one crore in damages for publishing false reports. The case was filed in the court of the Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Delhi. Process initiated on June 21, 2002, the case charged six parties—Vir Sanghvi, Editor, *Hindustan Times*; Rakesh Sharma, Publisher, *Hindustan Times*; Rajnish Sharma, Reporter, *Hindustan Times*; Sutirtho Patranobis, Reporter, *Hindustan Times*; Managing Director, *Hindustan Times*; Mohan Chand Sharma, Inspector, Special Cell, Delhi Police—for "being in league and publishing defamatory material, which is a deliberate and intentional attempt to misguide the public opinion against the complainant, SAR Geelani"(Addnl Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Delhi's Court Files, 2002).

The case for defamation, which was filed under Sections 499, 500, 501 and 502 of the Indian Penal Code, was specifically for two reports that appeared in the newspaper—one on 17 December 2001: a) "Hunt for Teacher's Pet in Jubilee Hall," bylined Rajnish Sharma and b) "Don Lectured on Terror in Free Time", bylined Sutirtho Patranobis.

The first report said: "Investigations into the international connections of Delhi University lecturer SAR Geelani have led to intelligence agencies to Delhi University's Jubilee Hall Hostel in the north campus … Intelligence sources said Gilani was 'extremely friendly' with a Jordanian student who had been staying at the Jubilee Hall …Gilani used to visit the Jordanian student's room no. 164 regularly where the two used to have long discussions, lasting several hours. Investigations revealed that some of the students at the hostel had become suspicious. They thought that perhaps Gilani and the Jordanian student were hatching some conspiracy," an investigating official said." The report continued about the "long international calls both used to make," adding that "Gilani helped Jordanian student when he got into a fight with some hostlers" etc.

Along with the report a box item, titled "PROFESSOR'S PROCEEDS," said: "Gilani recently purchased a house for Rs.22 lakhs in West Delhi"; "Delhi police are investigating how he came upon such a windfall." etc. Taking offence at what the complainant (SAR Geelani) called the above news item— "totally false, baseless and mischievous"— he argued in a written submission (Addnl Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Delhi's Court Records, 2002: paragraph: 9):

- The complainant never purchased any house in Delhi. Question of making any payment of Rs 22 lakhs does not arise at all. The complainant had taken on rent a modest two rooms flat at 535 Mukherji Nagar, Delhi in January, 2000 at Rs.3300/- p.m. where he had been residing with his family consisting of his wife, two minor children and his younger brother. There was no basis or any evidence for arriving at any conclusion of any kind of "windfall" and for reporting so to the world at large and thus misguide the public.
- That though the complainant was friendly to Jordanian student Mr. Quais Omari, a PhD student in Physics Department of Delhi University, there were no dubious connections as tried to be made out in the aforesaid report. The said Jordanian student had become victim of some communal minded students in Jubilee Hall hostel who had been harassing and torturing the Jordanian and who found it

> impossible to stay in the hostel and had to look after alternative accommodation. The complainant was trying to help him out and had also approached the People's Union of Civil Liberties (PUCL) in favour of the Jordanian. PUCL had also written a letter to the University authorities in favour of the Jordanian student. There were no "international connections," no "international links," no "long discussions, lasting several hours," no "international calls, often lasting to 45 minutes to an hour," "no international numbers to which the complainant and Jordanian student made calls". All such allegations made in the said news-items were totally false and motivated.

Geelani's second complaint was against the news report titled "Don Lectured on Terror in Free Time." It was reported that Geelani was taking or giving lessons on terrorism in his free time, behind closed doors, either at his house or at Shaukat Hussain's, another accused in the case.

Geelani complained: "The said news item is also false, concocted and intentionally misleading. The accused are liable to be prosecuted and punished for the same …. That there was no material or any kind of evidence to enable the accused to publish the aforesaid malicious news item" (Addnl Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Delhi's Court Records, 2002: 10).

It further said:

> *The main purpose of the accused in getting published the aforesaid news-items was to harm the reputation of the complainant by providing incorrect and misleading information to the people about him and to create wrong impressions in the mind of the public about his status and character. It was also a sinister attempt to prejudice the minds of his friends, colleagues and relatives so that they are dissuaded from meeting him or offering any kind of help to him or his family in the hour of dire need. In fact, large number of his friends, colleagues and relatives were deeply affected by the said news items and formed wrong impressions about him (Addnl Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Delhi's Court Records, 2002: 11-12).*

The complaint, concluded: "All the accused jointly or severely, reliable to pay Rs. 1,00,00,000/- (Rs. One Crore Only) to the complainant on account of damages for harming his reputation and causing his mental tension and agony by publishing the aforesaid malicious news item about him. The accused are also liable to be criminally proceeded for the aforesaid offence of defamation" (Addnl Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Delhi's Court Records, 2002: 12-13).

The *Hindustan Times* did not publish any apology, as asked by SAR Geelani through his legal notice on 21 June, 2002 (Pancholi, 2002). But when the Delhi High Court acquitted SAR Geelani on 29 October 2003, the paper admitted "the mistake" in reporting. The editorial, titled "Of Innocence and Guilt," carried on October 31, 2003 said:

> *From the day the Delhi Police arrested Mr Geelani, evidence linking him to his supposed crime and official insistence that they had caught a prime conspirator in the December 13 attack were out of sync. When the Delhi Police announced that they had come across vital evidence to prove beyond doubt that Mr Geelani was guilty, many—including this paper—made the mistake of believing them. For as the Delhi High Court judgment on Wednesday acquitting Mr Geelani made clear, there was not enough evidence to link him to the Parliament attack case.*

However, the *Hindustan Times* never apologised to Geelani for the false information it carried. The one-crore defamation case had not yielded anything legally, as Professor SAR Geelani died of a heart attack a few years after his acquittal from the Supreme Court. But the case nevertheless brought up for debate the lopsided coverage of the *Hindustan Times*.

NDTV Broadcasting a Police Production of Afzal's Confession

The third instance of challenging media reporting was when Afzal found the programmes on NDTV "malicious" and "a set of lies" and sent notices against the channel, similar way Geelani took on the coverage of the *Hindustan Times*. When Afzal's mercy petition was pending with the President, on 16 and 17 December 2006, NDTV India

broadcast Afzal's confessional statement taken under the police custody in 2001. Afzal's argument was that the confession was set aside by the court, and why, then, should the media show a confession made under coercion in police custody as "truth" and "exclusive journalism." The notice sent through Afzal's advocate ND Pancholi to Barkha Dutt, the Managing Editor, NDTV, said:

> *I met Afzal in jail on 20th December, 2006 and told him about the tape and the repeated performance of NDTV. He was amused. He told me that there was not one such tape but several, as before producing him at the media conference the police had forced him to rehearse his "Bayaanâ" (statement) five or six times. Before that, he had been brutally tortured for about two days. Urine was forced into his mouth. He was given repeated beatings. Once he was kept completely naked throughout the day, and on that day one of the public witnesses who was to give evidence against him later in the Court also participated in the beating. He was also hung by ropes. The next day he was given a written statement and was made to rehearse it five or six times. Rajbir Singh, ACP, instructed him,"Iske Aage Nahin Batana, Iske Peechhe Nahin Batana (Do not add anything to or remove anything from this statement)". Afzal was told that his brother Hilal was in the custody of the STF in Kashmir and that if he wanted the safety of his brother and family, he should speak in the media conference on the line s of the "Bayaanâ" tailor-made by the police. Each rehearsal was video-recorded.*

Pancholi recollected the conversation in the letter he sent to the channel's Managing Editor: "I told her that any statement given by an accused in police custody has no value and is inadmissible in law and that the alleged confession of Afzal made in police custody had been rejected by the Supreme Court. I also told her that media conference organized by the police in December 2001, in which Afzal was shown admitting to his involvement in the Parliament attack, was also strongly disapproved by the High Court and the police were reprimanded for having conducted such an unlawful exercise."

But the channel continued the broadcast and repeated it on the next day as well. And it was this "one sided story" and "com-

plete lie" that Afzal challenged through his legal notice against the television channel.

The legal notice further said[20]*:*

> *Your repeated news bulletins over two days reduced the issue of the hanging of Afzal and his Mercy Petition pending with the President to a very simplistic solution "Show repeatedly the video tape (an unlawful piece of evidence) of the alleged confession of Afzal recorded in police custody as breaking news, convince the viewers that it has brought out the ultimate truth, ask them to send SMS messages to NDTV conveying their opinions about the "Phansi" (hanging) of Afzal, and then pour out the "collective opinion" gathered in this manner to pave the way for the prompt hanging of Afzal."What a simple, quick solution of an issue involving the life and death of a citizen!....on his [Afzal's] behalf, I request you to faithfully present his side also to your viewers, without any suppression or distortion.*

But the channel did not broadcast what the Afzal's lawyer called "Afzal's side of the story." Instead, the channel's managing editor, Barkha Dutt replied on 31 December 2006 that she was not the person in charge of NDTV India and had nothing to do with the programme, trying to absolve herself from the responsibility.

She said her channel, which is NDTV, "has done a number of balanced shows on this case."[21] But her column in *Hindustan Times*, which appeared before she received the above legal notice with the title "Death of the Middle Ground," had something contrary to suggest about her association with the programme:

> *... But life goes on. As I write this, NDTV has received a tape of Afzal's so-called confession to the police; a "confession" he later said was induced by torture and then retracted. We spent many hours debating what the fairest way to use the content of the CD was, and finally decided that we would use his "confession" only in juxtaposition with the statement he finally submitted in court.*

At no point does she make a difference between *NDTV* and *NDTV* India. She openly associated herself with the decision to go ahead and broadcast the "confession." While the legal notice to *NDTV* and the reply it received from Barkha Dutt were circulated over email to a list of SPDPR, the prisoners' rights organisation that was doing Afzal's case, the author and essayist Arundhati Roy wrote to Adv. Pancholi that she was outraged by the channel carrying out irresponsible journalism. Referring to the programme, she said:

> *At no point either in her [Dutt's] column or in the programme do they say that the confession was set aside by the Supreme Court. In fact, at the start of the programme, for several minutes the visual is inset in a text that says: Afzal ne Court mein gunaah kqabool kiya tha. This is only one of several inaccuracies, insinuations and outrageous lies.*

Afzal's lawyer sent a reply contesting Barkha Dutt's claim that her channel carried "balanced shows." In a letter dated 4 January 2007, Pancholi said:

The channel chose to broadcast a one-sided lie in the form of a video tape which the police kept as a most guarded secret while the case moved from trial Court to High Court to Supreme Court over about six years till it was given to NDTV as an "exclusive" item! I do not understand the logic of this. On receiving the tape, what any journalist of moderate intelligence should have asked was, "Why did the police not produce this tape in the Courts during the last five or six years when the case was pending?" The only answer could have been that it was an exercise not sanctioned in law. But this aspect was conveniently avoided. The real issue is whether in a democracy the media should be allowed to become the mouthpiece of the police. This is what should concern us all.

This communication between Afzal through his lawyer and the channel did not lead to a court case. However, it became the only instance Afzal challenged a media house when it carried stories that harmed his interest. Even though there was no correction in the media coverage of the national security conflict studied, questions were raised in the subsequent years about the kind of journalism practices this case

reflected.[22]

Geelani, who received 62 percent of the total space, of 3,638 cm^2 area of reports on the four accused, was acquitted after staying 22 months on death row. He said he could not walk around in the streets in his own country without public glare and living with the image of a terrorist in the public's eye, because of the media painting him as a terrorist.

Similar instances of media carrying false reports and losing their case when the victims challenged it in the courts are many in the recent times. The High Court in London awarded Sheikh Rashid Ghannouchi, leader of the Tunisian opposition party An Nahda, £61,000 in libel damages following the publication of untrue allegations linking him with Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda. The offending article, published within weeks after the 9/11 attack, appeared in the London-based Arabic daily newspaper, *Al Arab*.

Al Arab, the longest established among the pan-Arab newspapers, refused to apologise and made strenuous efforts to defend its article. However, it proved itself unable to convince the Court that it had any evidence to link the Tunisian politician with Osama bin Laden.

CONCLUSION

The courts and defamatory cases are expensive and tedious ways to ensure the institution of the press is held accountable for not reporting cases fairly and accurately, with an idea to be inclusive to all parties, including the prisoners. In the national security case studied, there is a terrible imbalance in the representation of points of view, as shown by both the quantitative and qualitative analysis. If at all there were any rare attempts from the media to turn away from using the police as a main source of information in covering this conflict, it happened at a much later stage, when activists and university professors came to defend SAR Geelani, and they started challenging the media houses legally in the courts. The family members of the accused, the All India Defence Committee for SAR Geelani, University Teachers in Defence of SAR Geelani and the Mercy Campaign for Mohd Afzal provided the "other" side of the conflict, but the media was hardly interested. The police or /government version always outnumbered in area and display of the national security conflict studied.

This forced such groups to look for alternative means of communication—websites, pamphlets, posters, leaflets, signature campaigns, academic journal articles etc. But the reach of this method was limited to a section of men and women in the universities, law and journalism and was mostly circulated in the intellectual circles in Delhi and not at the level of the general public, except in the case of Kashmir, where postcard and signature campaigns, and local papers provided mass participation. So, in a nutshell, not only is it evident that the media reported information based on the confessions which were false, published misinformation and lies, and selectively ignored certain facts which could have been verified against court records, but also it did not acknowledge, and rectify the faulty journalism practices after the High Court and Supreme Court took strong objections against the "media trial," "lies the police planted" etc

Explaining the volume of coverage in terrorism or national security conflicts, an important theorist on war on terrorism, Faisal Devji argued[23] that threat perception makes good news, and thus automatically the coverage increases in terrorism- related news. This phenomenon was very evident in the case studied, and to satisfy the demand for greater coverage on threat perception, unverified information and lies usually found its way into media. Devji argued that the immensity of American power, together with the globalisation of militancy, has changed the face of the war against terrorism, and thereby pushed the war beyond the inherited institutions of political life. In such a collateral impact of the war on terrorism, he assigns a major role to the institution of the media, which acts as a tool in the hands of the dominant players, the perpetrators of a paranoid approach. Lies, therefore, is part of the collateral impact to spread a statist viewpoint.

Also, no news related to terrorism was local. Everything was global. It is true from the media reporting of December 13 that the media quickly connected the event to a global narrative of terrorism very prevalent in the year 2001. As Devji argues:

> *Media, for example, continually ape the apocalyptic effect of an empty present, because they bring together widely scattered constituencies in the contemplation of an event deemed newsworthy even if it occurs in some remote corner of the world with which these audiences have no real connection, and which does*

not even represent a substance spread by connections of geography or history.[24]

With the 13 December terror attack, the media thus brought together many scattered constituencies of interests, from national security to the global war on terrorism, Kashmiri separatism and Islamophobia, but showing no interest to include the versions of the accused. Rather, it published lies after lies, which wee finally dismissed by the courts.

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ANALYSING DINA THANTHI COVERAGE OF TWO CUSTODIAL DEATHS IN THOOTHUKUDI IN JUNE 2020

/ Ramani Mohanakrishnan

ABSTRACT

This case study analyses media coverage of the custodial deaths of P Jayaraj and J Bennix—a father and son who lived in Sathankulam, in the Thoothukudi district of Tamil Nadu—in June 2020. Both belonged to the Shudra community in the caste order, and the Backward Class community as per government qualification and were Christians by faith. The incident is placed in the context of police violence and custodial deaths, referring to reports by the National Campaign Against Torture, the National Human Rights Commission and the National Crime Records Bureau to indicate how the majority of people who die in police custody are from marginalised communities, including Dalits, Adivasis, Muslims and Christians. It then employs quantitative and qualitative content analysis techniques, focussing on the coverage of the deaths in the Chennai edition of the Tamil daily, Dina Thanthi, *from 23 June 2020 to 23 July 2020. It makes observations, such as the fact that the newspaper dedicated approximately 5 percent of its total space to the incident for 30 days after it had occurred. The irony is that the killings of the father and son in police custody took place*

only days after George Floyd was killed by the Minneapolis Police in the United States, and the protests and wide scale condemnation were taking place all over the world, including in India.

The brutal killings of Jayaraj and Bennix themselves were not featured on the front page of the paper, though the case found space on the front page after the Central Bureau of Investigation took over from the state police and the reports on the front page stated someone was being arrested or investigated in relation to the case. Further, unless mentioned in a statement issued by somebody involved, the news reports did not mention police beatings or brutality—they largely deployed ambiguous phrasing such as wanting justice for victims who died "mysteriously" while in custody. The case study also attempts to examine how the incident was covered in a broader sense, drawing on court documents, official statements and so on, and concludes that though media is used to reiterate that justice in such cases can be brought about by rigorously punishing the perpetrators, systemic change is needed to confront the justice system.

RAMANI MOHANAKRISHNAN was born in a historically marginalised community in a small town in Thanjavur district, in Tamil Nadu. She is a first-generation graduate and has a B.A. in Journalism from Madras Christian College, Chennai and an L.L.B from the Faculty of Law, Delhi University. Legal research and journalism are her passions.

CASE STUDY

The term "custodial deaths" is self-explanatory. It refers to the death of a person, a suspect, an accused or a convict while in police or judicial custody. According to a report published by an international human-rights body, the National Campaign Against Torture—NCAT—a total of 1,723 custodial deaths were recorded by the National Human Rights Commission—NHRC—in India in 2019.[1] This total works out to roughly five deaths every day.

Experts suggest the number is much higher than the record shows. The NHRC reported 914 custodial deaths from January to July 2020.[2] Of those, 53 were in police custody. One thousand and sixty seven custodial deaths occurred from January to May 2021.[3] Most of these cases go unnoticed, as such deaths are often attributed to illness or natural causes, or alleged death by suicide. Nevertheless, the custodial deaths of a father and son in Sathankulam, in the Thoothukudi district of Tamil Nadu, drew the attention of the subcontinent because of the extent of the crude brutality it demonstrated.

The victims, 59-year-old P Jayaraj and his 31-year-old son J Bennix, owned a mobile-accessories shop in Sathankulam. Jayaraj and Bennix were detained by the police, citing COVID-19 lockdown violations, on 19 June 2020. (However, the chargesheet filed by the Central Bureau of Investigation on the case denied any lockdown violations.) Both the father and son died due to the injuries suffered during the police "interrogation." Their post-mortem reports confirmed police brutality and identified that the injuries sustained caused their deaths.[4] The victims belonged to the Nadar caste, historically the Shudras, the people born out of the feet, according to ancient Hindu texts. Over the years, due to social-justice movements, the Nadars in Tamil Nadu have become economically and socially powerful while still regarded as part of the Backward Classes category. However, the Nadar caste is known for its historical struggle against caste discrimination and hierarchy, and its recent upward mobility often invites discrimination, while it is also true that there are many cases where the Nadar people mete out discrimination on communities regarded lower to them in the caste hierarchy, such as the Dalits. Counted historically as Shudra, the Nadars therefore have a peculiar social standing, of being lower to the upper castes, but in terms of numbers and influence, are thriving and also causing discrimi-

nation to people regarded lower to them. To avoid caste discrimination from dominant castes, many Nadars converted to Christianity at different times in Tamil Nadu.

Custodial Deaths in India

According to the National Crime Records Bureau—NCRB—reports, a total of 1,727 persons died in police custody between 2001 and 2018 (including deaths that occurred during judicial remand).[5] However, this data is not conclusive for two reasons: firstly, experts opine that several cases were not submitted into the records, and secondly, official databases contradict one another. For example, according to the NCRB, the number of deaths in police custody in 2018 is 70, but the NHRC reported 147 cases during the same period.[6] [7]

It is crucial to note that the majority of deaths listed as having occurred in police custody in the NCRB data are attributed to illness, natural causes or alleged suicide. Families of the deceased, from time to time, have alleged foul play by the police in attributing these reasons as the cause of death. While the union-government database does not provide details on whether they are prolonged or sudden illnesses, physical assault by police has been recorded only since 2014, and in just 6 percent of cases. According to an article in the online news portal *Scroll*, police assault was recorded as the cause of death in only 2.4 percent of the cases of custodial deaths in 2019.[8]

Another report from the NCRB reveals the extent to which the police enjoy impunity. According to its reports from 2005 to 2018 relating to the death of 500 "persons in remand," 281 cases were registered, 54 policemen were charged, but not a single policeman was convicted. Furthermore, 312 cases were registered concerning 700 "custodial deaths before remand," of which 132 policemen were charge-sheeted, and only seven were convicted.[9] It is important to note that deaths before remand would mean the detainee dying within the first 24 hours after the arrest, before the suspect is even produced before the magistrate. (The right to be produced before the nearest magistrate within 24 hours of his arrest is a fundamental right of the accused person under Article 22(2) of the Constitution of India; and a mandate for the police under Section 57 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973). The NCAT report states that at least 60 percent of custodial deaths occur

within this period.[10]

The NCAT reports identify the common forms of torture the police use in custody, including electric shocks, hammering nails into the body, applying chilli powder on different parts of the body, branding with a hot iron, inserting rods into the parts of the body after forcing legs apart, hanging upside down, merciless beating, etc.[11] The analysis from the 2019 report indicates that around 60 percent of the victims who died in police custody are from poor and marginalised communities, such as Dalits, Adivasis and Muslims.[12]

According to the Prison Statistics of India, 2019, 21 percent and 13 percent of the incarcerated individuals in prisons are from Dalit and Adivasi communities, respectively 16 percent are Muslim. They comprise 34 percent of the prison demographic, while their population is only 24 percent.[13] The NCRB's 2019 report reveals that two out of every three under-trial prisoners are from Dalit, Bahujan and Adivasi communities, and Muslims comprise the highest number of under-trial prisoners among all religious minorities.[14] In the Indian context, since there has been a number of conversions of Dalit and Adivasi communities to Christianity, and the individuals for affirmative action hide their religious identity, the breakup data is not available on the basis of religion.

The Tamil Nadu police are notorious for their use of ruthless torture methods. According to NCRB data, Tamil Nadu reported at least 35 custodial deaths between 2014 to 2018, for which no one has been convicted.[15] The state also has one of the highest tallies of custodial deaths. It is usual for the Chennai police to release photos of the accused in custody with fractured arms and legs due to "slippery toilets."[16]

Custodial Deaths of P Jayaraj and J Bennix

According to news reports, the Sathankulam police took Jayaraj to the police station for an inquiry on 19 June 2020, close to 8 pm.[17] It is alleged that Jayaraj made critical remarks against the police and lockdown restrictions in place the previous day—on 18 June. The news reports state that Bennix rushed to the station and questioned why his father had been brought to the police station and was being subjected to torture. Bennix reportedly pushed a constable while trying to defend himself from maltreatment. Subsequently, he was also detained by the

police.[18]

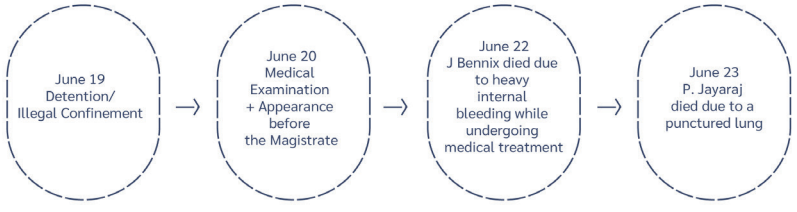
The charge sheet filed by the CBI, accessed by an online media outlet, reveals that Jayaraj and Bennix were beaten for hours. It unveils the gruesome way the deceased persons were tortured, which includes sexual assault.[19] It is also reported that they were denied legal assistance, and they were not allowed to meet a lawyer until 20 June.[20] The victims were taken to the Kovilpatti Hospital for medical fitness testing and then to the Sathankulam magistrate, who remanded the victims to the Kovilpatti Sub Jail.[21] It is reported that the victims were continuously bleeding from their rectums and were thoroughly soaked in blood, resulting in them having to keep changing lungis at the hospital. It is also reported that the magistrate did not physically examine the victims, and instead waved his hand from the first floor of the building while the police stood outside.[22]

The family did not hear any information regarding the father and son after the remand until 22 June. Bennix died due to heavy internal bleeding while undergoing treatment at Kovilpatti Government Hospital, on 22 June. Jayaraj died due to a punctured lung while undergoing treatment on the following day.[23] The post-mortem report by the team of three doctors confirmed that Bennix died of complications due to blunt injuries he had sustained, and as many as 18 injuries were found on his body.[24]

The dreadful deaths of Jayaraj and Bennix led to a social-media uproar. The case is under trial by the CBI. In a case filed by Selvarani, Jayaraj's wife, the Madurai Bench of Madras High Court directed the lower court to complete the trial in six months, in the interests of timely justice.

The following chart depicts the timeline of the events that transpired:

Chart A



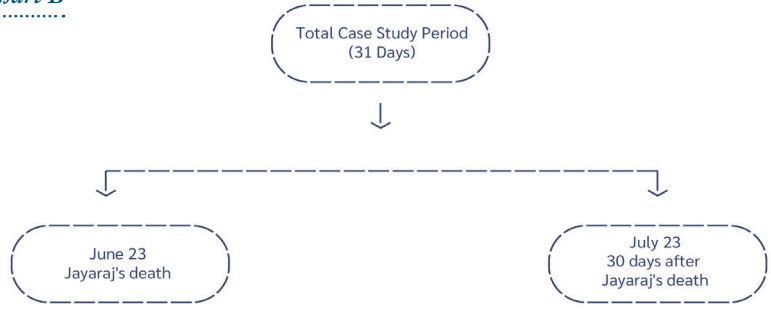
METHODOLOGY

This study employs both quantitative and qualitative content analysis techniques. The quantitative analysis focusses on one Tamil daily, *Dina Thanthi*, Chennai Edition, for 31 days from 23 June 2020 to 23 July 2020, examining its coverage of Jayaraj and Bennix's custodial deaths. The qualitative analysis attempts to study how the incident was covered in a broader sense, making use of all the other possible sources, including court documents, official statements and so on.

QUANTITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS

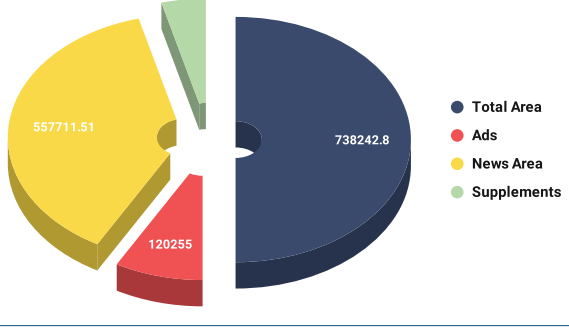
Number of days analysed: 31 days
Total area analysed: 7,38,242.8 cm²

Chart B



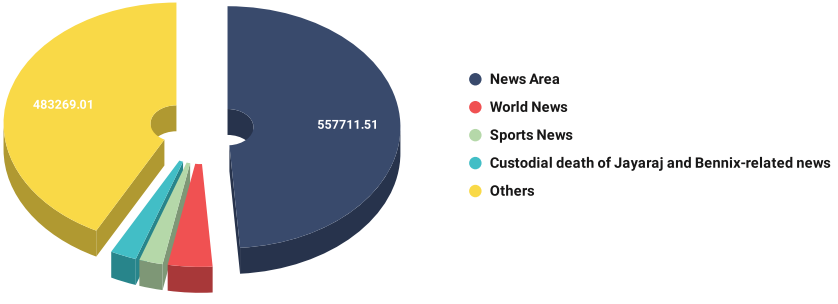
The following chart shows the distribution of the total area:

Chart C: Distribution of the Total News Area



Distribution of the General News Area—a total editorial space of 557711.51 cm^2:

Chart D: Distribution of the Editorial



The chart below represents how news related to Jayaraj and Bennix's deaths was distributed (and thereby fell under different categories):

Chart E: Distribution of the Editorial

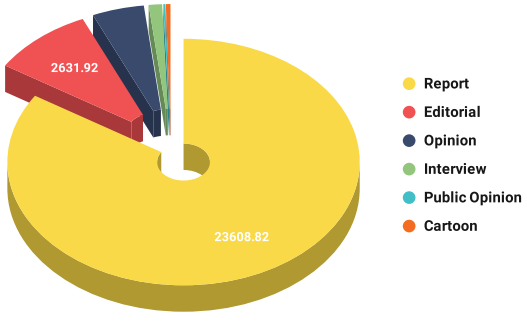
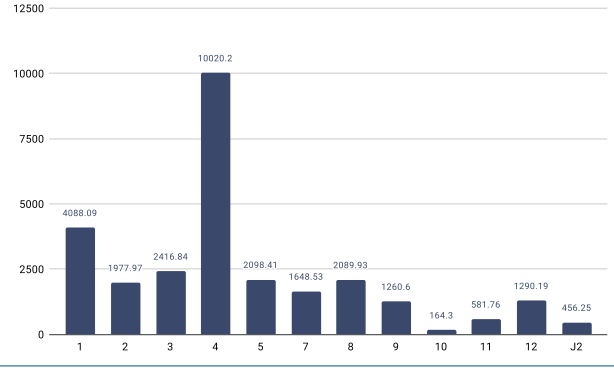


Chart F: Distribution of news relating to the deaths of Jayaraj and Bennix (Page Prominence)



*cm^2

Points of view represented

Chart G shows the representation in cm^2 received for each of the following interest groups:

- Tamil Nadu government
- Tamil Nadu Chief Minister
- Retired deputy superintendent of police, Ramachandran
- State Human Rights Commission, Tamil Nadu
- Revathi (Witness: Woman police)
- Judiciary: *Madurai High Court, Magistrate (Kovilpatti Judicial Magistrate M. S. Bharathidasan)*
- Law enforcement or investigative agencies: *Crime Branch, Crime Investigation Department (CBCID), Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), Thoothukudi District Superintendent of Police Jayakumar, Director general of police Tripathi, CB-CID IG Shankar*
- Political Parties/Politicians: *Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK): M. K. Kanimozhi, M. K. Stalin, Ponmudi, KKSSR Ramachandar, L Balaraman*
- Anaithu India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK): *Rajendra Balaji, Kadambur Raju, C V Shanmugam, O Panneerselvam, Edappadi K. Palaniswami*
- Communist Parties: *Sitaram Yechury (CPI-M), Balakrishnan (CPI-M), Mutharasan (CPI)*
- Indian National Congress (INC): *Rahul Gandhi, Chidambaram, Vasantha Kumar M.P, KS Alagiri (President of Tamil Nadu Congress party)*
- Others: *Sarathkumar (Samathuva Makkal Katchi), Kamal Hasan (Makkal Needhi Maiam), L. Murugan (Bharatiya Janata Party), Ramadoss (Pattali Makkal Katchi), G.K. Vasan (Tamil Maanila Congress), Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, Viduthalai Siruthaigal Katchi (VCK)*
- Caste/Trade Unions/Associations: *Chennai Vaazh Nadargal Sangam, Nellai-Thoothukudi Nadar Magamai Paripaalana Sangam, Tamil Nadu Kshatriya Nadar Iyakkam, Manal*

Lorry Urimaiyaalargal Sangam, Nadar Mahajana Sangam, Tamizh Nadu Vanigar Sangam Peramaippu, Tamizh Nadu Marunthu Vanigar Sangam Peramaippu, Tamil Nadu Viyaabarigal Sanga Peravai, Pazhavanthangal Vattara Viyabarigal Sangam

- Lawyers' Associations: *Chennai High Court Lawyers Association, Tamizh Nadu Mootha Vakkeelgal Amaippu*
- Celebrities: Cricketers: *Dhawan, Ashwin, Harbajan Singh*
- Kollywood/Bollywood Celebrities: *Surya, Bharathiraja, Rajinikanth, Vairamuthu, etc*
- Others: *General public, family, Markandeya Katju, Stéphane Dujarric spokesperson for the United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres.*

Chart G: Points of view Represented

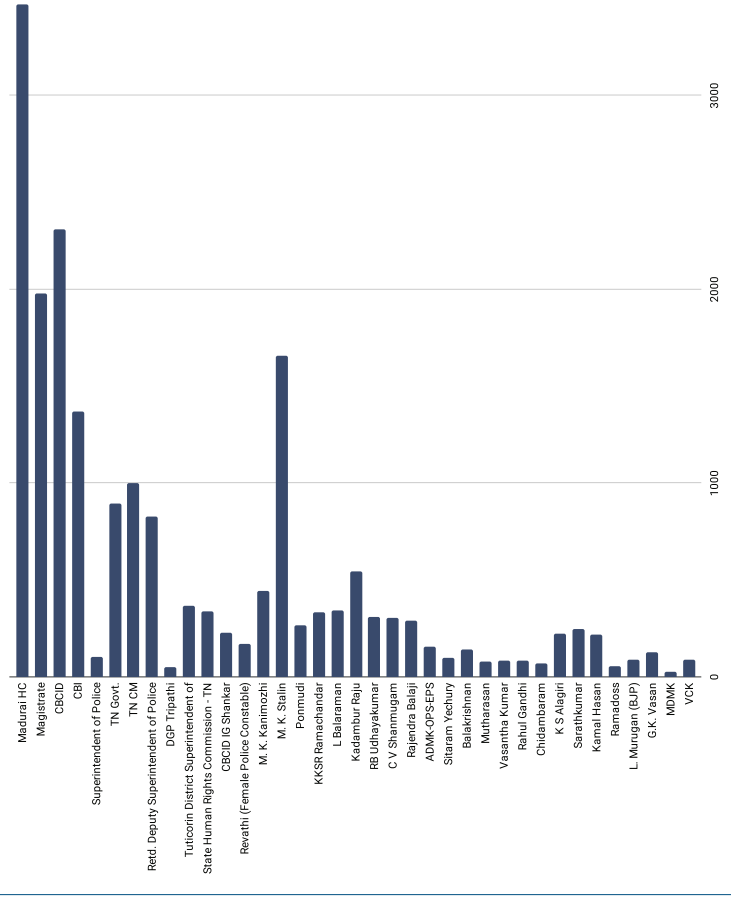


Chart H: Nature of the Source

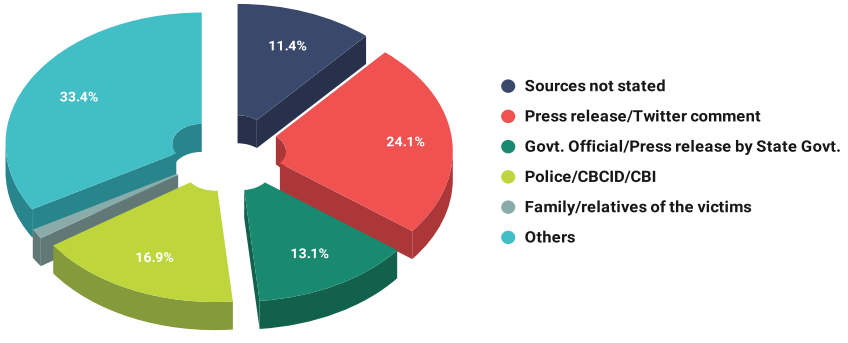


Chart I: Message Chart

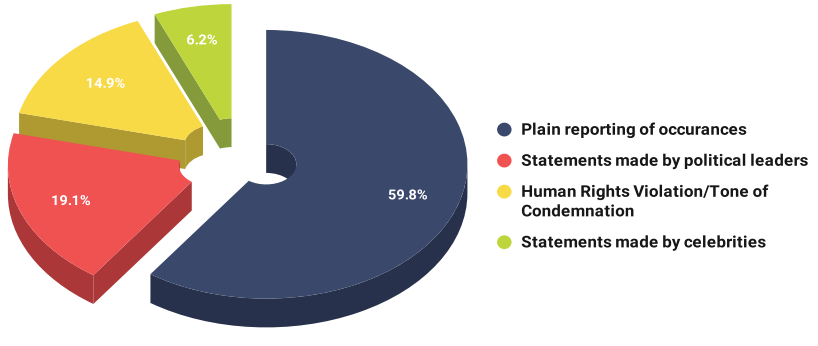


Chart J: Split up of Reporting

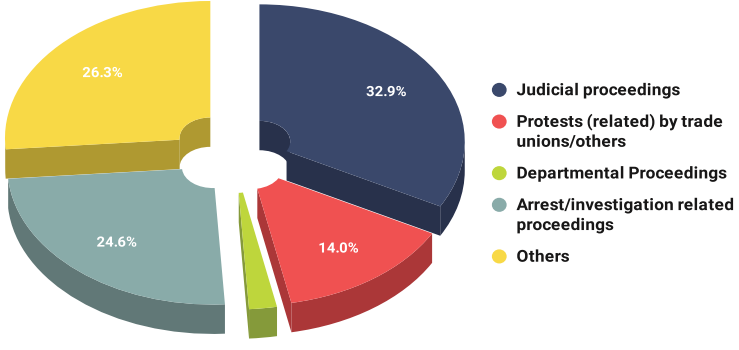


Chart K: Distribution of Dateline

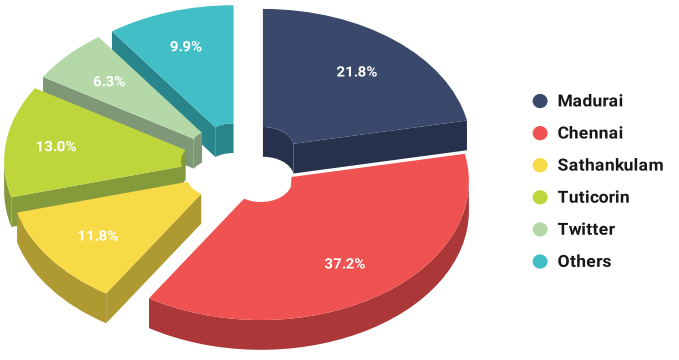
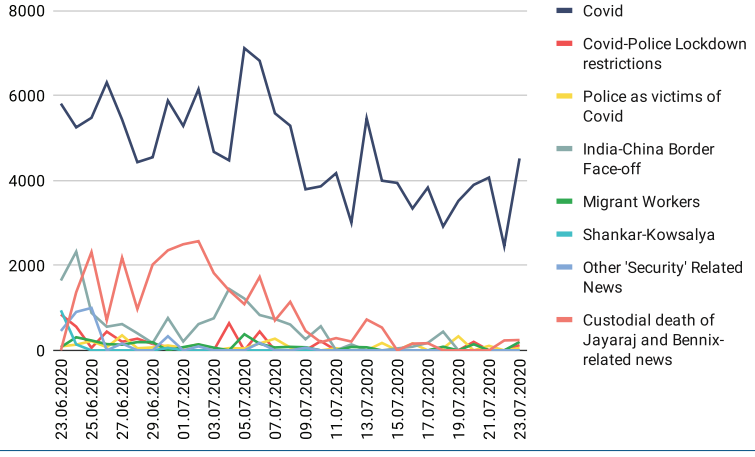


Chart L: Type of News



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Out of the space analysed, advertisements and supplements occupy 1,80,533.4 cm^2 in the total area (as shown in Chart C). That leaves 557711.51 cm^2 of editorial space in the General News Area. News coverage of the deaths came to approximately 28,093.04 cm^2, about 5 percent of the total news area studied for the period (as shown in Chart D).

As shown in Chart F, the bulk of the news related to the deaths was featured most on Page 4, followed by the front page. Accordingly, the newspaper gave the news of the death prominence in terms of coverage.

Chart D and Chart L also further demonstrates this inference.

Another analysis of the news reported in terms of the points of view represented, in Chart G, shows that politicians and celebrities received predominant coverage. The chart also exhibits how significant space went to caste- and trade unions or associations. From Chart J, it is clear that at least 14 percent of reporting was on the protests conducted by trade unions or others, further supporting this conclusion.

Chart H reveals that the family or relatives of the deceased victims comprised as meagre as one percent of the total news area covering the duo's custodial deaths. The most prominent space was given to sources of a different nature, such as Twitter comments, press releases by government officials and the police, and so on. The victims, or people closest to that lived experience or ecosystem, are not, in the newspaper's judgement, worthy of coverage as much as opinions echoed on social media by others.

Chart I and Chart L, read together, indicate that the preponderance of the coverage was only the plain reporting of occurrences and that most of it related to reporting judicial or arrest-related proceedings—58 percent of the total reports were from either of those categories. Even though a number of reports that suggested the incident was a human-rights violation, or condemned it, they were comparatively less than the others, as shown in Chart I. Out of 12 pieces that either spoke of the incident as a human-rights violation or those that condemned it, eight were editorials, two were opinion pieces on how the police must conduct itself, one was a cartoon and another was public opinion.

While Chart K shows how some reports were from the Sathankulam and Thoothukudi district, it also makes evident that most of the reporting is not done from the ground but from Chennai. Lastly, from the graph in Chart L, we learn that news related to COVID-19 occupied most of the space of the newspaper in the given period. Besides this, the China-India border faceoff and news related to security issues of India found significant coverage in the paper during the period under study.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

The quantitative content analysis shows that the coverage on the is-

sue started only on 24 June, a day after Jayaraj's death. The first day of coverage began with condemnation statements, from opposition party leaders, and specifically from the DMK. The first day's coverage also included reports on the State Human Rights Commission proceedings, information about the Madras High Court's Madurai Branch taking up the case suo moto and police departmental measures such as transferring police officers and moving some involved in the case to the waiting list.

The coverage shifted to DMK leaders from the second day, and after that to ruling AIADMK leaders issuing counter political statements concerning the incidents. Reports covered statements of condemnation and protests carried out by the unions, including by Nadar caste unions and trade unions that may or may not have an association with the Nadar caste. From there, the coverage moved to the compensation funds provided by political parties to the victims' family, including by the AIADMK, the DMK and the INC. The news coverage of the incident declined gradually, to cover departmental or judicial proceedings in the second half of the study period analysed.

While other political parties and their leaders also issued several statements condemning the duo's custodial deaths, these only found a small portion in the newspaper. Their names were listed one after the other, along with a news report carrying the DMK leader MK Stalin's statement. This trend continued almost every day, as the other opposition parties or leaders found very little to no space and, if at all they did, these were covered in small columns of news.

It is essential to mention that despite being one of the largest parties in the state, the VCK, an anti-caste Tamil-nationalist party representing the lowered castes with its roots in the Dalit Panthers movement, received very little coverage. On 3 July, the report on the go mentioned the party held a protest in a very small column, while other caste- or trade unions received more space for their protests. It should be noted that leaders from the DMK, specifically Stalin and MK Kanimozhi (a member of parliament from the Thoothukudi constituency, whose mother belongs to the Nadar caste), took up most of the news coverage. Apart from the trade-union leaders, other political-party leaders who were given coverage and belonged to the Nadar caste were H Vasanthakumar from the INC and Sarathkumar from the SMK. It is critical to mention, too, that the founder of *Dina Thanthi* is also from

the Nadar caste. While we cannot conclude that those who were given more coverage space were given it due to their caste, the trend reveals that, apart from the DMK leaders, other political-party leaders did not receive as much space, and that unions had more coverage in the news reports. Besides, a few other leaders who received more space, though not from the Nadar caste, were from other backward castes (relatively dominant castes).

While Thol Thirumavalavan, a member of parliament, was mentioned in a few places, online protests held by the VCK party headed by him, on 1 July 2020, did not get coverage. There were also other protests organised by various movements and federations, which were ignored. One such protest was on 28 June 2020, organised by People's Watch and other progressive-Periyarist-Ambedkarite-Tamil nationalist movements who often champion social justice issues.

It is appropriate to mention that *Dina Thanthi* reported on departmental proceedings, such as the transferring of police officers within the related jurisdiction of the incident. Such departmental measures received prominence, including the arranging of mental-health counselling, high-level police officers reiterating instructions to be followed during arrests, and the enforcement of COVID-19 regulations. It is fitting to mention here that while the brutal killing itself was not featured on the front page, the reports related to the duo's killing found their space on the first page only when the case was transferred to the CBI. It is also necessary to mention that the front page only covered reports that stated that someone was being arrested or investigated concerning the case.

Apart from police department proceedings, judicial proceedings received more space; this continued after 23 July (the end of the period being studied). After 3 July, when the news coverage had already been reduced, the newspaper carried at least one piece on court-related proceedings or investigation-related measures taken by the CBI and the CBCID.

Unless mentioned in a statement issued by someone, the news reports did not mention police beatings or brutality. The reports either neglected to mention beatings or brutality altogether, or only mentioned the two dying during police custody alongside the word "mysteriously." After the first two days, the reports largely used the word "samba-

vam"—incident—or words that denoted the deaths that had occurred. Out of 124 reports, as few as twelve reports explicitly mentioned police beatings. On 1 July, the Madurai branch of the Madras High Court observed that the case has prima facie evidence for a murder trial. On the following day, a couple of reports referred to the case as the "Thoothukudi double murder case," or along those lines. After 13 July, the reports uniformly used terms that would be deployed to denote a murder trial, but mostly avoided the words "beating" or "brutality."

While there were eight editorials on the incident between 23 June and July 2020, only one of them made a mild suggestion that the police department needs reform. Others made observations about speedy trials, the CBI's investigations, departmental proceedings, and so on. They were solely focussed on getting "justice" for the father and son's gruesome killing. However, the editorials did not have a straight-out description of what that "justice" would entail. They were often accompanied by phrasing such as "the perpetrators should be punished rigorously." It is, thus, safe to say that the editorials primarily focussed on carceral punishment, which, in hindsight, isolated this particular horrific incident from the larger issue of custodial deaths. Identical phrasing or opinions were also reflected in other statements made by politicians, celebrities and others. (It is significant to point out that the police opened fire, just a couple of years before this incident, killing at least 14 and leaving hundreds injured during a mass protest against the Sterlite Copper plant owned by Vedanta Limited.)

The daily ran two opinion pieces on the incident. One opinion piece, published on 4 July, briefly mentioned the police department's history and touched upon colonialism and its impact. It also briefly mentioned 22 procedures to be observed during an arrest and questioned cinema's role in glorifying the "police investigations" or brutality. All the while, the newspaper carried remarks that glorified the police force and their "strict" observation of the COVID-19 protocols. Noticeably, there were regular updates on police personnel contracting COVID-19, and their recoveries, in news reports. (Medical practitioners or other frontline workers did not have any separate columns that updated the number of COVID-19 infections and recoveries that had transpired among them.)

The second opinion piece, which is interview-like, explained the procedures to be followed during arrests and detentions. Neither of the

opinion pieces denoted the incident as the "Jayaraj-Bennix killing case," nor did they use any similar words that signified brutality of any kind.

While the duo's death had a significant presence in the coverage, there were other reports of harassment, some of which led to suicide, and these did not get many follow-ups in the news. These included the following incidents:

- On 21 June, an electricity worker was beaten in broad daylight in Thiruninravur, in the Tiruvallur district, by police personnel, for not having an e-pass, even after informing them that he was going to his work. On 22 June, the newspaper covered the news, as the video went viral. The next day, the newspaper stated that the Human Rights Commission was questioning the police department. Nevertheless, there were no follow-ups.
- On 27 June, a construction worker allegedly killed himself in Ettayapuram, Thoothukudi district, after being beaten up by police personnel. The incident was reported the next day, along with two other news reports carrying statements by MK Stalin and MK Kanimozhi condemning the incident. The next day, a statement by actor Sarathkumar was reported. In his statement, he also provided a condemnation of another incident, regarding an auto driver who died due to the injuries suffered during a confrontation with the police. Neither the news related to the deceased construction worker, nor the death of the auto driver was followed up on.
- On 30 June, a news report on police allegedly dragging a person on his way to buy medicines was carried after the news went viral. On 3 July, an auto driver's self-immolation, after police seized his vehicle, was reported. On 4 July, there was a report of police personnel beating a youth for not stopping during random vehicle-checking on the road. None of them received any follow-up reporting. Apart from these incidents, there were several incidents of people volunteering as "friends of police," and abusing their power by beating the public. These were neither reported nor followed up on.

Therefore, it should be noted that Jayaraj and Bennix's custodial deaths seem to have assumed significance due to the gruesome nature of the incident, which was later vividly discussed on social media, and which engendered the public uproar. This was also due to other facts, such as pressure by the unions (since they both belonged to an arguably more dominant caste, one that is primarily involved in state-level trade or business and has a sizable population that could decide electoral victory). All these factors may have led Tamil Nadu's largest-selling Tamil newspaper to dedicate approximately 5 percent of its total space for the 30 days after the incident occurred. But even so, the reports, as mentioned, often deployed ambiguous phrasing, such as wanting justice for the victims who died "mysteriously" while they were in custody.

As mentioned, the victims belonged to the Nadar community, which holds economic and social power in the southern part of Tamil Nadu.[25] Historically, however, the Nadar caste has been recognised for its resistance against caste discrimination and hierarchy, particularly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. During this time, they led several uprisings for women's right to wear upper body clothing,[26] the right to enter temples,[27] access to education, among others.[28] In the post-twentieth century, the Nadar caste has experienced significant upward mobility.

The Tamil Nadu Police Department, particularly known for its caste biases, has faced scrutiny for a long time. Former Tamil Nadu Chief Secretary TV Venkataraman acknowledged these biases, leading to the issuance of a Government Order in August 1982 by the Home Department. This order prohibited police officers from being posted in areas predominantly inhabited by a particular caste or community to prevent the development of vested interests and favoritism based on caste considerations.[29] Despite these efforts, a government-appointed commission highlighted the prevalence of members from a particular dominant caste within the police department, after caste clashes in the southern districts of Tamil Nadu in the 1990s. The commission recommended against such postings.[30] Nevertheless, it is important to note that the previously mentioned order only applies to the rank of Inspector and above.[31]

In the case of Jayaraj and Bennix's custodial deaths, the issue of caste has been largely overlooked due to the victims belonging to a dominant Shudra caste. Nevertheless, a few media reports have explored the po-

tential role of caste in the case.[32] These reports primarily focus on another incident of custodial death involving a relative of a suspect, who died from head injuries sustained after being in custody.[33] The victim, Mahendran, belonged to the Asari caste, a Shudra caste that primarily engages in crafts.[34] The reports also name specific police personnel, particularly SI Raghuganesh, who belongs to the Konar caste, another dominant Shudra caste. It is alleged that SI Raghuganesh instigated caste-based divisions among Konar youth during elections and abused his power against individuals from other castes, especially Nadars.[35] There are also allegations that SI Raghuganesh imposed a "caste tax" during the COVID-19 lockdown, extorting money from individuals of other castes except Konars.[36] However, *Dina Thanthi* did not touch upon the caste of the victims or the accused.

While this case study has tried to examine how *Dina Thanthi* covered these deaths, this analysis also helps to understand the patterns used for reporting similar cases. In a carceral-justice system founded upon colonialism and thriving casteism, such killings cannot be seen as isolated incidents. The media is used to consistently reiterate that justice can only be brought about by rigorously punishing the perpetrators. However, several systemic changes are urgently needed to confront the failing justice system and the longstanding oppression and murder of Bahujan, Dalit and Adivasi persons, especially when they face the brutality and the bias of the police and the state machinery, and that inherent subtext was absent in the coverage.

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HOW VIJAYA KARNATAKA, VIJAYA VANI AND PRAJAVANI COVERED THE PROTEST OF THE POURAKARMIKAS

/ Meljo Thomas Karakunnel

ABSTRACT

This case study analyses the coverage, in Karnataka's three most circulated newspapers, of protests that were carried out by Pourakarmikas—literally meaning corporation workers—who collect garbage, sweep streets and transport trash to landfills in Bengaluru. In July 2020, the workers (who have protested for fundamental rights at least twice a year for nearly every year over the last decade) were on strike for ten days, demanding PPE kits, drinking water and sanitisation of work equipment while they worked as frontline workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The workers went on a strike with similar demands a month later, at the end of August 2020. The researcher studied the three top Kannada newspapers, Vijayavani, Vijaya Karnataka *and* Prajavani.

One reporter from Vijaya Karnataka *told this researcher that information about Pourakarmikas' strikes tends to be published when the city's waste is not segregated and the middle-class population of the city is affected as a result of the protests. But in this case, even that was not proven to be*

true, since there was no coverage in Vijayavani *or* Vijaya Karnataka, *during the period studied for each. The media tends to find a lower news value for the protests of the sanitation workers, who often belong to the lowest caste and class strata.*

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CASE STUDY

On 21 November 2020, the Social Justice Ministry of the Union Government directed states to mechanise manholes and rename them to machine holes by April 2021. In India, manual-scavenging and sanitation jobs are still embedded within the power structures of the caste system. Sanitation workers, like the Pourakarmikas in Bengaluru, often come from the marginalised castes. Literally meaning corporation workers, Pourakarmikas are employed to collect garbage from door to door, segregate the wet and dry waste, sweep the streets and transport the trash to the landfills.

Pourakarmikas did frontline work along with health professionals during the pandemic. Unfortunately, these frontline workers felt compelled to protest, as both the state government and the city corporation, Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike—BBMP—had ignored their wants and rights for a long time.

This study analyses newspaper coverage of the last two protests of Pourakarmikas against the BBMP, outsourcing contractors and the state government, to learn how journalists represented the Pourakarmikas' protest. It studies first the three most-circulated Kannada newspapers, namely *Vijayavani*, *Vijaya Karnataka* and *Prajavani*, from 21 to 31 July and 21 to 31 August 2020, around the dates of the strikes. It includes in-depth interviews conducted with Pourakarmikas, news reporters and BBMP officials, to gauge their views.

Garbage Decomposition in Bengaluru

The City of Bangalore Corporation, formed under the Bangalore City Corporation Act, 1949, underwent significant changes thereafter. The name itself has changed thrice since, from Bangalore City Corporation to Bangalore Mahanagara Palike and, finally, to Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike. The BBMP spreads across 713 square kilometres, with a total population of 1.3 crore. The city's demography holds over 29 lakh households, divided into eight zones, 27 divisions and 198 wards.

The city's garbage doubled over the last five years and it churned out around six thousand metric tons of solid waste per day, at an average generation rate of 0.6 kg per capita. Moreover, decomposing and recycling became difficult, since the segregation of waste does not happen

at the source. The pandemic situation aggravated the issue, as the state generates around 3,000 kg of biomedical waste a day, for which the treatment facilities charge nine times the normal rate, according to a 2020 article by BP Naveen and PV Sivapullaiah.[1]

The total mixed waste generated in January 2020 in the city was 21,981 tons, and the wet waste processed was 87,623 tons, at an average of 1.26 kg per household per day. The solid waste is primarily collected on auto tippers and pushcarts from every thousand households and two hundred homes. It is then taken to the landfill sites, for treatment through tipper lorries and compactors, from the secondary location.

The solid-waste management wing of the BBMP is equipped with 27 mechanical sweepers, 587 mustering locations, 593 compactors and 4,646 auto tippers. However, around 70 percent of the waste collection and disposal activities are carried out by private contractors, who are paid by the BBMP, which does not have the facility to handle it.[2]

Illegal constructions, outdated revenue records, the booming online food-delivery system and the piling up of biomedical waste during the pandemic have worsened the city's garbage scenario. For instance, the six biomedical waste-treatment facilities in the city struggled to incinerate the COVID-19 waste, especially the polypropylene-made PPEs. The waste-management system, not just in Bengaluru but across India, was not prepared to handle the pandemic. This situation makes sanitation workers, who are already vulnerable, most exposed to the contaminated waste.

Pourakarmikas: A Contextual History

B Basavalingappa, the Minister of Municipal Administration in Karnataka, used the word Pourakarmikas for the first time in September 1972, at a conference in Delhi. Previously, sweepers and scavengers were addressed by abusive, derisive and loaded caste names. In Hindi, the term takes different caste-specific names, such as Bhangis, Halalkhor, Balmiki and Chuhra. They are not restricted to one religion. Bhangis are further categorised into Shaikhs, Helas, Lalbegis, Ghazuri Rauts, Binaparis, Rauts, Haris and Bansphors, according to Stephen Fuchs's 1981 book.[3] There are 101 castes and sub-castes in Karnataka within the Scheduled Castes, and they were mostly treated as untouchables. A government survey conducted across 18 states in the country identi-

fied 54,130 people engaged in manual scavenging in 2019; however, 11 states did not submit the data, while several states reported imbalanced data, or a low number of manual scavengers as compared to the high number of service latrines in the states.

The story of Pourakarmikas in Bangalore is not different from the rest of India. Socially and economically vulnerable communities and individuals carry out scavenging and cleaning in the city. In 2013, Parameshwara and Deshmane[4] reported that many of the Pourakarmikas are chronic urban poor in terms of wealth, service accessibility, health and social status. They migrated from villages and other states, searching for better-earning opportunities in Bengaluru. They enter the scavenging job out of desperation, as there are no wage labourers available in their vicinity.

Most Pourakarmikas are selected by the corporation and hired by outsourcing contractors working under designated supervisors in specific areas across the city. In 2017, the BBMP conducted a detailed audit of Pourakarmikas registered on its payrolls. The audit numbers of 15,000, however, did not match the number of 32,000 provided by the outsourcing contractors.

The BBMP website, in 2022, shows 18,500 Pourakarmikas registered on its payrolls to keep the city clean and green. In addition, a large number of them also work in factories, companies, residential areas, shopping complexes and other private institutes, making it difficult to know the exact number of Pourakarmikas working in the city across different sectors. It is also estimated that 13,000-14,000 sanitation workers go to the field every day.

The sanitary workers of Bengaluru are categorised into road sweepers, latrine sweepers and drain sweepers. The first two categories come under the engineering department of the BBMP, whereas the drain sweepers are under the administration of the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board. There are 100-450 sweepers in a ward, under three to seven supervisors, who in turn report to the ward inspector. Most of the sweepers employed in Bengaluru work on a contract basis and are under outsourcing contractors. For instance, 394 out of 407 Pourakarmikas working in the Hemmigepura ward in the Rajarajeshwari zone are contract labourers. They were in service for the last 7-20 years as well. The contract workers are paid less as well as late. They

also work under poor conditions, without adequate safety measures and equipment.

Protests by Pourakarmikas

From time to time, the Pourakarmikas had to protest for basic human conditions—from clean drinking water to changing rooms to release payment dues, and safety kits. They protested at least twice a year nearly every year over the last decade. Most of these protests were under the BBMP Pourakarmika Guttige Sangha banner, affiliated to the All India Central Council of Trade Unions. In 2020 alone there were three such protests within two months, starting from July 2020. These were the initial months of the pandemic, almost a year before the vaccines, and the workers demanded PPE kits, drinking water, the sanitisation of work equipment, and so on. By the time of the protest, five had succumbed to the virus, while fifty were infected and were not given institutional quarantine facilities by the government. The protesters also said they were given masks and gloves in the initial phase, but there was no follow up thereafter. Considering the unrest among the workers, the BBMP declared that they would test all 14,000 Pourakarmikas and would ensure quarantine facilities for those who tested positive.

The ten-point demand of the protestors were:

- The conducting of mandatory COVID-19 testing for all Pourakarmikas immediately
- The regular provision of fresh masks, gloves, boots and face-shields, along with disinfectants for pushcarts and garbage vehicles
- The provision of a space for changing clothes, wash rooms and toilets at all mustering centres, on a war footing
- The conducting of thermal testing and health camps for all workers at their mustering centres
- The ensuring of segregation of waste at the source and treating of all garbage from quarantined homes and containment zones as biomedical waste. No Pourakarmikas must be forced to collect trash from such areas
- Bringing all workers, including auto drivers and helpers, under the direct payment system with immediate effect,

and the provision of full-body PPEs for them on a war footing

- The organisation of an institutional quarantine facility for Pourakarmikas who tested positive for coronavirus
- The disbursing of all pending payments, including transport allowance, to the workers immediately
- The creation of a helpline for Pourakarmikas to lodge their grievances during the pandemic
- The creation of awareness on the spread of COVID-19 and precautionary measures adopted by Pourakarmikas and the provision of information about hospitals, care centres, quarantine facilities, quarantine methods and other necessary details.

Selected Newspapers

The three most circulated Kannada newspapers in the state—*Vijayavani*, *Vijaya Karnataka* and *Prajavani*—were selected to study their coverage of the Pourakarmikas' protests. The three newspapers together enjoy a reader base of 14,028,24, over three-fourths of the readers of Kannada newspapers (*Vijayavani* has a readership of 551,994; *Vijaya Karnataka* of 503,688; and *Prajavani* of 347,142).

The industrialist and BJP politician Vijay Sankeshwar started *Vijayavani* in 2012, which he still owns. The same politician had started *Vijaya Karnataka* in 1999, and it was sold to the owners of *The Times of India* in 2006. These two newspapers respectively are the first and the second most circulated Kannada newspapers. *Prajavani*, the third newspaper studied, is owned by the group that publishes the English newspaper *Deccan Herald*. It was founded by KN Guruswamy, a liquor businessman, and until *Vijayavani* and *Vijaya Karnataka* entered the market, *Prajavani* was the market leader. Now it is pushed to the third spot in the Kannada language journalism, but still is respected highly for being independent, and committed to the old-fashioned ethical values in journalism.

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

Vijayavani and *Prajavani* were analysed for both the strikes of the Pourakarmikas in July and August 2020. (Since *Vijaya Karnataka* did not give access for July 2020, the newspaper's content analysis has been carried out only for the second strike, in August 2020).

Table 4: News-story analysis of the selected newspapers (For the period 21-31 July 2020)

Date	VIJAYAVANI		PRAJAVANI	
	Main Stories	Pourakarmika protest stories	Main stories	Pourakarmika protest stories
21.07.20	Economic crisis- No loans for farmers; Bangalore Unlocks.	Nil	Economic crisis and lack of loans; Bangalore Unlocks.	Nil
22.07.20	Unlock started in Karnataka; COVID-19 cases increase rapidly.	Nil	Doctors and nurses get a hike in salaries; COVID-19 cases increase rapidly.	Page 3 - A small story on the reasons for the Pourakarmikas' protest
23.07.20	IT sector employees work from home till the end of this year; Rs. 20,000 crore losses in Bangalore during the lockdown.	Nil	Rajasthan election: political crisis/ matter goes to Supreme Court; More than 28,000 people turn negative in Karnataka.	Page 7 – A half page special story about how risky the job is and how the government needs to provide Pourakarmikas with their requirements

24.07.20	Rs 5 lakh crore investment in Karnataka, 20,000 jobs will be created; New investment policies; Opposition brings out another set of data stating that the government misused money in the name of pandemic management.	Nil	New policies to create 70 percent more job for Kannadigas; Karnataka government in need of serious financial support.	Nil
25.07.20	Pakistan-China relationship as a threat to India; Bengaluru breaking records in the number of cases.	Nil	Rajasthan election-finally getting a result; Bengaluru breaking records in the number of cases.	Nil
26.07.20	Yeddyurappa government celebrates anniversary; Traces of ISIS in Karnataka.	Nil	Yeddyurappa government celebrates anniversary; Government employees over the age of 50 to get leave with salary.	Nil
27.07.20	Unlock criteria prepared; COVID-19 cases about to cross one lakh in Karnataka.	Nil	Unlock criteria prepared; Delays in old-age pensions.	Nil

28.07.20	Raphale to fly tomorrow; the chief minister soon to change the portfolios of ministers.	Nil	The chief minister is soon to to change the portfolios of ministers; The serious issue created by the lack of doctors at many hospitals.	Page 2 - Pourakarmikas strike at Pulikeshinagar. The death of five Pourakarmikas made the strike stronger. They were demanding free treatment for workers with COVID-19.
29.07.20	China products banned in India; A rise in negative COVID-19 cases presenting a positive sign.	Nil	China products banned in India; Discussions around the change of chief minister in Karnataka; Yeddyurappa declines the rumour.	Nil
30.07.20	New education policy released; Night curfew ends in India.	Nil	New education policy released; Night curfew ends in India.	Nil
31.07.20	Education policy to create new trends; No more lockdowns on Sundays.	Nil	No colleges to open till the end of August; CET exams soon.	Nil

Vijayavani carried no news on the Pourakarmikas' protest or any related stories from 21-31 July 2020, although it published nearly a thousand reports during the period analysed.

On the other hand, *Prajavani* carried three stories relating to the protest in 11 days. Notably, there was no front-page story about the protest. It published a half-page opinion piece on 23 July, on page 7, detailing the risks involved in scavenging and cleaning jobs during a pandemic and asked the government to address the Pourakarmikas' demands. It also carried a short interview with the BBMP commissioner Manjunath Prasad.

Prajavani stands out in its coverage of the protest by Pourakarmikas held in July 2020, whereas *Vijayavani*, owned by the politician affiliated to the ruling party, found no news value in the protest. Other factors to consider include the fact that Karnataka's BJP government celebrated one year in power on 27 July; it is possible that, given this, as one of the reporters interviewed said, the state government might have wished not to have too much negative news in the media. But going by more systemic issues in the media coverage, there is an obvious caste and class bias that the newspapers started by politicians and owned by philosophies driven by advertisement demonstrate, over the traditional newsrooms such as *Prajavani*, which still covers the issues of the workers and a cross section of society that the other papers do not cover.

Table 5: News story analysis of the selected newspapers during the second protest analysed (21-31August 2020)

Date	VIJAYA KARNATAKA		VIJAYAVANI		PRAJAVANI	
	Main stories	Pourakarmika protest stories	Main stories	Pourakarmika protest stories	main stories	Pourakarmika protest stories
21.08.20	Mysuru tops in cleanliness; descriptions of Ganesh Chaturthi; Heavy rain in Belgaum district. Supplement: Bangalore ranks 214 in cleanliness.	Nil	Government motivates dairy farming; Transportation department launches a taxi app to compete with Ola and Uber; COVID-19 updates; Mysuru as the cleanest city	Nil	Over 10,000 vacancies in government hospitals; Doctors and other staff pressured due to a lack of workers and excess patients; Mysuru tops in cleanliness, BBMP ranks 214th	Story on Bengaluru's poor show in the Swachh Survekshan 2020 survey rankings; workplace issues faced by the BBMP Pourakarmikas are detailed

22.08.20	Govt. doctors' lives are at risk due to a lack of hospital workers and excess patients; DK Shivakumar complains about phone tapping; CET Bengaluru students shine.	Nil	Data loss increased in smartphones; Government to introduce six townships; COVID-19 updates	Nil	Bengaluru and Mysuru students top CET; COVID-19 updates: Bengaluru crosses one lakh cases; D.G Halli riot.	Nil
23.08.20	Ganesh Chaturthi; Leave	Nil	Ganesh Chaturthi Leave	Nil	Ganesh Chaturthi Leave	Nil
24.08.20	Government officials gave the target to submit test reports of people; Pakistan confirms the presence of Dawood; Congress in need of a president.	Nil	Pakistan releases a list of wanted criminals with Dawood Ibrahim's name on it; Congress party needs a new leader; Drug peddling cases are increasing in Bengaluru.	Nil	Child marriage cases increase during lockdown; Congress in search of a president; COVID-19 protocol for film and serial shootings.	Nil
25.08.20	Sonia to continue as president of the congress; A lack of oxygen cylinders in many districts; Karnataka fears the second phase of the virus; Metro rail to start from September 1	Nil	Poor conditions reported in government hospitals; Sonia Gandhi back to Congress president post; Government to reduce quarantine days.	Nil	Sonia Gandhi comes back to the position of Congress president again; Periods-leave: private companies create a platform for discussion; The number of COVID-19 negative cases cross positive cases.	Nil

26.08.20	Colleges to reopen soon; NIA submits charge sheet on Pulwama attack; Quarantine rules for people travelling on flights changed.	Nil	Registration of property documents made online, but the server is always slow; RBI decides to stop printing Rs. 2,000 notes; The anti-corruption bureau finds many BBMP officials not following rules regarding road construction and the removal of buildings from encroached land.	Nil	Education ministry released Shiksha Mithra App for government teachers; Loan festival for the people of lower strata; Yeddyurappa visits flood-affected areas in Bagalkot and Belgaum.	Nil
27.08.20	Opposition sets to fight for state government share of GST; RBI relief moratorium ends on 31 August; Colleges wait for the approval of the state to reopen.	Nil	Farmers of state receiving packets of seeds at their doorstep; Drivers of two and four-wheelers need to wear a mask: BBMP commissioner Manjunath to the high court; the CM assures that all govt. servants working during a pandemic are safe.	Nil	Colleges to reopen in October; BBMP's Indore model of waste management leads to corrupt tender undertakings; NEET exam in COVID-19 protocol - a Herculean task for the government.	Nil

28.08.20	No GST shares, take a loan from RBI- Union to the States; Drugs in the Sandalwood film industry; Government officials are given a target to submit test reports; the public says no to rapid antigen tests at many places.	Nil	Drug peddlers in contact with many actors in the Kannada film industry; Rs. 2.35 lakh crores loss for the union government during lockdown, due to tax reduction. Metro rail in loss of Rs. 598 crores; COVID-19 updates - 59 deaths in a day.	Nil	S.C. man murdered for sitting near to a higher-caste person; Narcotics Control Bureau gets clear information about the relationship of actors and musicians in the Kannada film industry with drugs; Magisterial investigation begins in D G Halli and KG Halli riot case.	Nil
29.08.20	Mysuru prepares for Dussehra; Karnataka in severe financial crisis; issue solved regarding the Sangaloi Rayanna statue in Shivaji circle	Nil	State governments are in enormous financial difficulty as the union government fails to provide GST share; Kannada Sangh installs the Sangolia Rayanna statue overnight in the middle of the road in Belgaum.	Nil	S.C. says the State government and UGC have no right to permit to make the final year students graduate without final exams; Fights over Sangoli Rayanna statue gets a solution; COVID-19 updates	Nil

30.08.20	Metro rail unlocks; Drug case -Kannada film stars in serious trouble; Schools to remain closed even during Unlock 4.0	Nil	Drugs worth crores have been found; Metro reopens on September 7; New National Education Policy set to be in action.	Nil	Many actors received notices from the NCB; Chidambaram calls Nirmala a messenger of God for a statement about how God is responsible for the present economic condition; Youngsters motivated in opening Nandini parlours in the city; COVID-19 updates	Nil
31.08.20	No decentralisation in Karnataka; RBI moratorium ends today; Bars and pubs are to open in Unlock 4.0	Nil	Union government takes strict actions to monitor government workers; Athmanirbhar-Chinese products in danger; the second phase of COVID-19 will be scary.	Nil	Clubs, pubs and bars to start from tomorrow; Development inequality in the city; Developed regions receive more funds and projects; Drugs deep-rooted in Bollywood.	Nil

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

The quantitative-content analysis of the three major regional dailies in Karnataka shows that the state-wide protest by Pourakarmikas did not grab much media attention, especially in the top two newspapers in the state. On 21 August the front-page news on all the three newspapers stated that Mysuru ranked first in the Swachh Survekshan 2020 survey rankings, announced by the Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry on 20 August. Bengaluru did poorly in the survey and was ranked 214 in the country, slipping 20 positions down from 194. The cleanliness ranking of cities has little to do with the welfare of Pourakarmikas. The primary criteria for the rankings are cleanliness, waste segregation, collection, transportation and public feedback. The reason why Bengaluru ranked so low might be the inadequate segregation of dry and wet wastes at the source of waste disposal.

Five days later, the Pourakarmikas in Mysuru, followed by other cities in the state, including Bengaluru, held protests demanding the direct payment of salaries to their respective accounts, without intermediaries such as contractors. The unions put forward the accusation that they are not paid on par with the promised wages.

Prajavani touched upon the difficulties that the BBMP Pourakarmikas face while segregating dry and wet waste in a story analysing the causes of Bengaluru's poor show in the Swachh Survekshan 2020 survey rankings. The amount of food waste in Bengaluru is constantly increasing, and people from the city hesitate to segregate the trash at the source (i.e., their households), increasing the Pourakarmikas' work. To compound this, Pourakarmikas are forced to work without proper safety gear and equipment, exposing themselves to health hazards. Both *Vijaya Karnataka* and *Vijayavani* found no news value for the protest, and so no reports or stories carried the details of protests by Pourakarmikas.

Manju Dasanapur, a Dalit journalist working with Vartha Bharathi, who has widely reported on Pourakarmikas' issues, observed that the major newspapers report strikes only if they are huge and create a crisis. In July, the Pourakarmikas' strike called for PPE kits, masks, gloves and sanitisers, since these were necessities, and five Pourakarmikas had already died of COVID-19. A few dailies reported this, and this issue

was addressed quickly by the authorities.

But the August strike called for a hike in salaries and insurance packages, and it was not as successful as the previous one, in terms of the public authorities yielding to the demands.

Pourakarmika unions tend to circulate news about the protest via news releases or phone calls. They make the updates of the protest and the developments readily available for the busy reporters, thinking this exercise will give a better chance at getting published, but, even then, the coverage was nil for the top two newspapers, and limited for *Prajavani*, especially for the second strike.

One reporter from *Vijaya Karnataka* told this researcher that information about Pourakarmikas' strikes tends to be published when the city's waste is not segregated and the middle class population of the city was affected as a result of the protests. But in this case, at least during the period studied, even that was not proven to be true, since there was no coverage in *Vijayavani* and *Vijaya Karnataka*, during the period studied for each. The media tends to find a lower news value for the protests of the sanitation workers, who often belong to the lowest caste and class strata.

CONCLUSION

Pourakarmikas, who are primarily from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, suffer from various occupational hazards due to delayed salaries, lack of leaves or holidays, social security benefits, and basic safety equipments while at work at the peak of COVID-19, resulting in both short and long-term physical and mental health problems. Additionally, these staffers are structurally oppressed and deprived of social dignity, education, and proper housing. They are, to a certain extent, victims of the caste system, the most notoriously successful and longest running fraud in Indian history, as observed by Wallace and Wallace in 1989. The present study throws some light on how media, the fourth estate in the country, contributed to the discrimination against the Pourakarmikas furthering their maginalisation and invisibility while they faced one of the toughest challenges in their lives during Covid 19.

Two out of three mainstream Kannada newspapers, run by upper-caste and upper-class management leaning towards the ruling

right-wing government, clearly negated the Pourakarmikas' protests. *Prajavani* tried to strike a balance in reporting by giving more insights into the unattended necessities of the protesting Pourakarmikas whereas *Vijaya Karnataka* and *Vijayavani* chose not to cover the protest. The reports on the Swachh Survekshan survey, which evaluates the cleanliness and sanitation of Indian cities, further confirm the media bias. Only *Prajavani* found the working conditions of the Pourakarmikas to be a contributing factor to Bengaluru's poor performance in the survey, while the other newspapers did not. Further, the media almost always failed to notice the structural issue, of the miserable working conditions of the Pourakarmikas, one of the frontline fighters of the COVID-19 battle, belonging to the lower strata of a caste-based society, until they protested or when the city's waste was not segregated.

This researcher interviewed a journalist working with *Vijaya Karnataka*, who said the protesting Pourakarmikas repeated their demands at every strike, and it was therefore difficult to convince the newspaper editors and management to give coverage to the same issues. But the structural question that did not strike the journalists was: why should a community hold a protest over and over again on the same demands in the first place? Can the media black out the coverage of the sanitation workers, protesting in several thousands, even when the demands seem to be the old ones, but remain unfulfilled? Moreover, the structural injustices in their lives often remain the same. These are valid enough questions in a society that promises to have a free press catering to all sections of the society. Communities like the Pourakarmikas, who barely manage to get their wages, hardly see any journalists emerging from their background, and getting into positions of seniority in the press to influence the coverage.

Ideally, the media coverage should help to raise awareness about the issues and challenges faced by communities such as the Pourakarmikas, and highlight their contributions to society, thereby reducing the social stigma and discrimination against Pourakarmikas and promoting greater social and economic inclusion. Unfortunately, by and large, we see an unaffected news media.

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The Times of India's Coverage of the Workers' Strike at the Honda Factory in July 2005

/ Vinod K Jose

ABSTRACT

This chapter analyses the media reporting of an industrial worker's strike, the Honda car factory strike in Gurgaon, Haryana, in July 2005. The content of The Times of India *newspaper is analysed, using both quantitative and qualitative research techniques. The quantitative analysis focuses on the period of one month, while the qualitative analysis goes beyond the quantitative measurement of newspaper coverage and attempts to study the issue, making use of all possible sources, including court documents, notices, pamphlets and interviews.*

The conclusions that can be drawn from this study is that the media coverage the class conflict at the Honda factory received was lopsided, with the versions of the workers, as well as inclusiveness, fairness and accuracy in reporting often missing. The class interests of the automobile company, and the affiliated class got more coverage than that of the workers. The coverage also tied into a broader trend of media coverage, where often the coverage begins only once the movement in question turns violent, thereby overlooking developments that led to the protest in the first place, and its larger context.

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VIOLENCE AT THE HONDA FACTORY IN GURGAON, A CLASS CONFLICT

Honda Motorcycles and Scooters India—HMSI—Ltd, is a subsidiary of Honda Motor Company Limited, Japan, which is one of the world's largest two-wheeler manufacturers. The Gurgaon factory is HMSI's first production unit in India and has an annual capacity of 200,000 scooters. It began operation in India in 2001. In 2005, the year of the class conflict under study, the company manufactured 600,000 scooters.

Honda Motors was very successful in the Indian automobile market. The company consistently grew by 50 percent, while the Indian two-wheeler manufacturer Bajaj Auto's sales dipped by 26 percent.[1] The number of employees at their Gurgaon factory also increased during this period. In 2005, around 4,000 employees worked in the company, out of which about 3,000 were permanent and 1,000 were on contract. The staff was pan-Indian in composition, with employees coming from states like Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Uttaranchal, Bihar and West Bengal, along with the home state of Haryana and its border states. The company had consistently recruited fresh mechanical engineering diplomas from industrial training institutes across the country through campus placements, thus making a pan-Indian composition at the factory.[2]

By 2004, the workers wanted to form a union, since isolated cases of humiliation and harassment were reported. A Japanese manager allegedly kicked a worker and disrespected the cultural and religious sentiments of the workers.[3]

The workers also felt they had to collectively bargain for a raise in salaries and better employment conditions. However, the management refused to recognise the union, a legitimate right of workers under the Indian Constitution. By then, a series of labour issues led to workers uniting against the management and indulging in collective bargaining with strikes and marches. This led to a clash of interests between the working class and the industrial manufacturers. The eight-month long conflict started with demands such as better treatment at the workplace, granting bonuses, etc. It began peacefully in 2004, but developed into a standoff between the company and workers, finally leading to a brutal police lathi-charge on the workers on 26 July 2005.

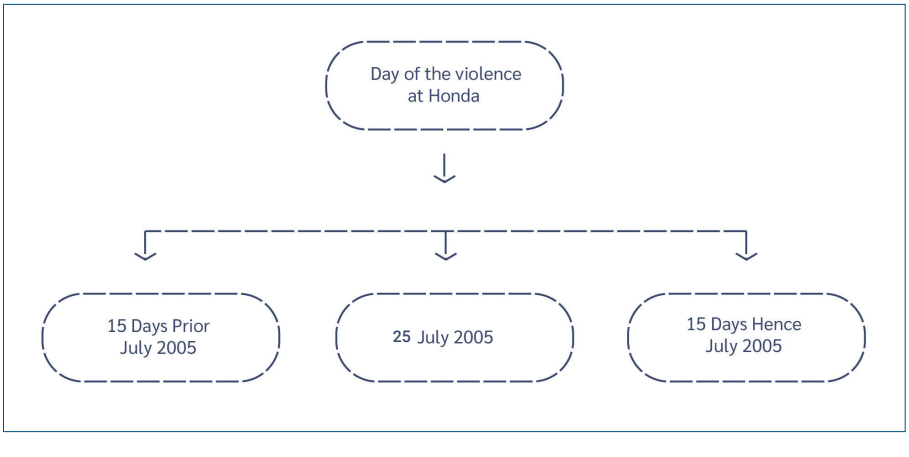
Interest groups in the Honda Class Conflict:

- HMSI Ltd
- Workers at the HMSI factory, Gurgaon
- Left parties (CPI, CPM, Forward Block, RSP and their trade unions) who spoke out on behalf of the workers' rights
- Corporations and industry bodies who defended foreign direct investment and criticised trade unionism
- BJP, Congress and other political parties who spoke out on the conflict
- Government of Haryana
- Police
- Government of India, represented mostly in this case by Prime Minister, Ministry of External Affairs, Home Minister

QUANTITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS

Similar to the methodology followed in other case studies, this part of the quantitative study analyses the content of only one newspaper—*The Times of India*, New Delhi—for 31 days, between 11 July and 10 August 2005. The period begins 15 days before the violence at Honda and ends 16 days after the violence.

Content Analysis - The Times of India, New Delhi edition

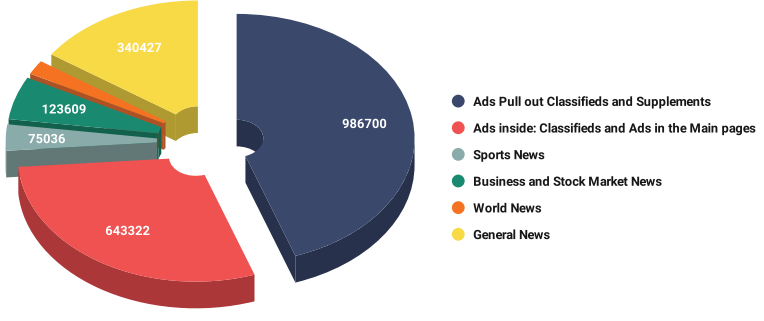


Number of days analysed: 31 days

Total area analysed: 22,10,208 cm²

The following chart shows the distribution of total area:

Chart 1: Distribution of Total area in the Content Analysed



Distribution of the general news area, 3, 40, 427 cm² is below:

Chart 2: Distribution of Honda-Related News in the Total News Area

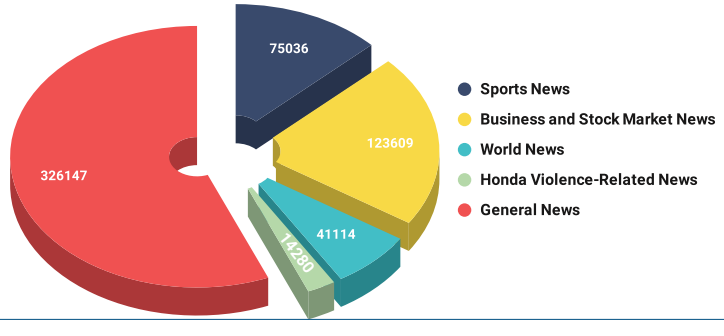
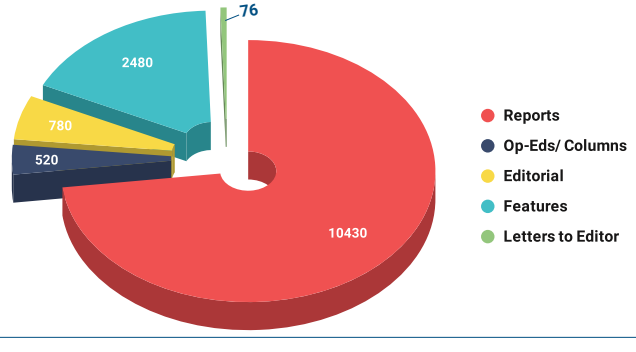


Chart 3: Distribution of Honda Violence- Related News

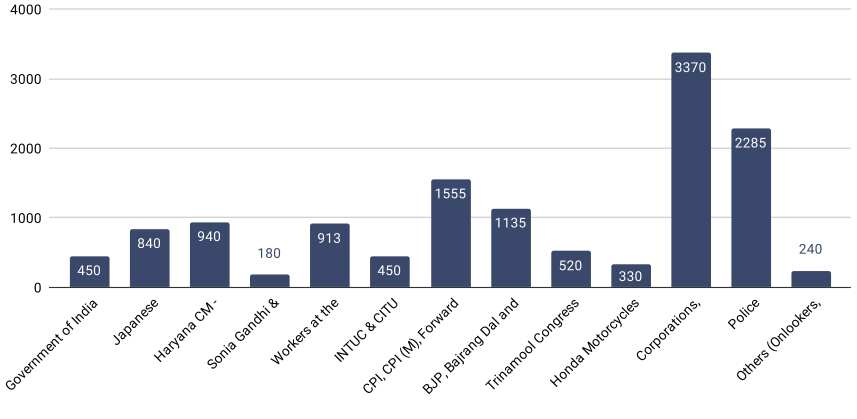


Points of View Represented in the Honda Violence-Related News

Chart 4 quantitatively shows the representation received for each of the following interest groups:

- Government of India: prime minister; home minister; the Ministry of External Affairs and other ministries
- Japanese government (Japanese envoy to India, Yasukoni Enoki, and Japanese Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry, Shoichi Nakagawa)
- Bhupinder Singh Hooda, Haryana Chief Minister
- Sonia Gandhi and Congress party
- HMSI Workers' Union
- HMSI
- INTUC and CITU
- CPI, CPI (M), Forward Block and RSP
- BJP, Bajrang Dal and Durga Vahini
- Trinamool Congress
- Corporations, industries and their trade bodies
- Police
- Others (onlookers, people at malls, etc.)

Chart 4: Points of View Represented



in cm²

Chart 5: Dateline Chart

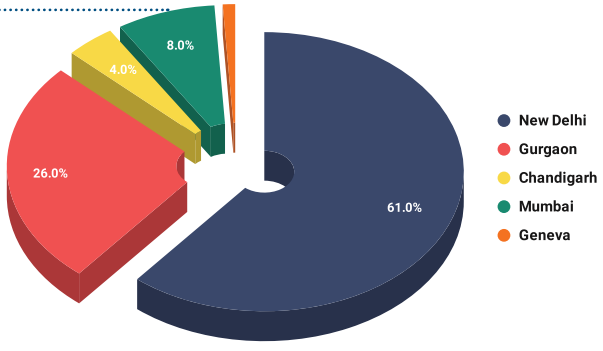


Chart 6: Message Chart

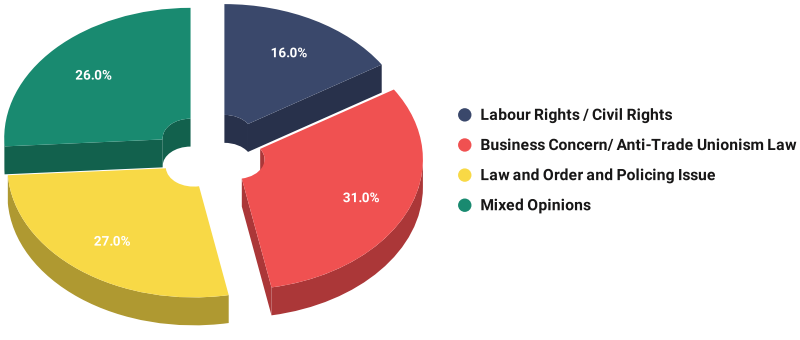
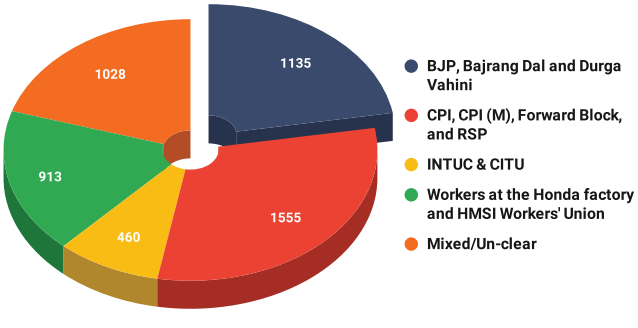
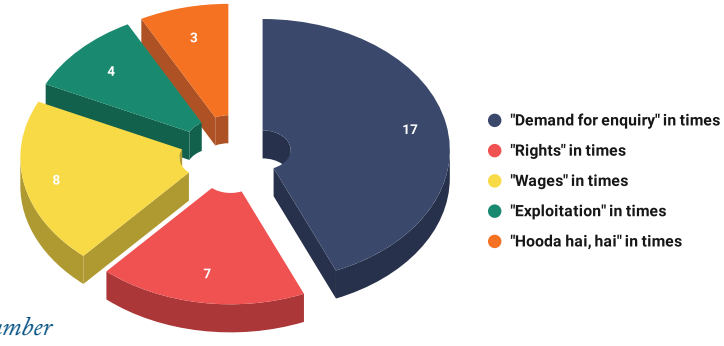


Chart 7: Representation of Pro-Labour Views



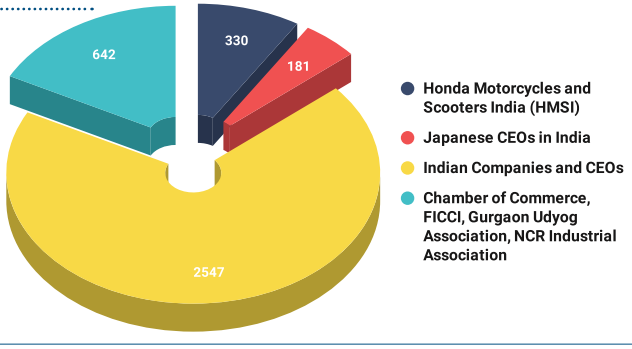
The pro-labour voices were scattered, and the most repeated demand/words were: "demand for enquiry," "rights," "wages," "exploitation," "*Hooda hai, hai.*"

Chart 8: Most repeated demands/ Words in Pro-Labour Coverage



** in number*

Chart 9: Representation of Pro-Management/Pro- Industry/Pro-Corporation/ Anti-Labour Views



The most-repeated words of the pro-industry/pro-management were: "TU slowing down FDI," "'no work no pay' policy of Supreme Court," "unions destroying the progress of India," *"Soniaji ki jai ho"* and *"Hoodaji ki jai ho."*

Chart 10: The Most Repeated Words in Pro- Industry/Management Coverage

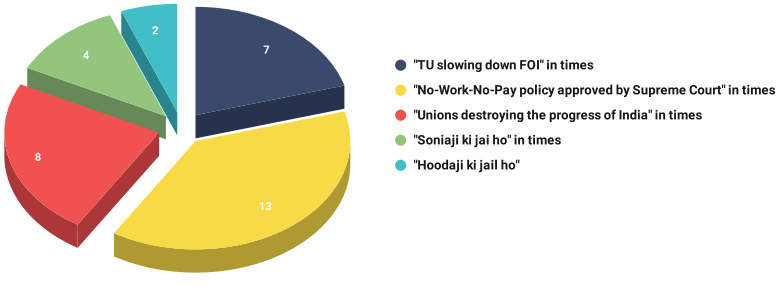


Chart 11: Most Quoted Business/Industry Groups in the Coverage

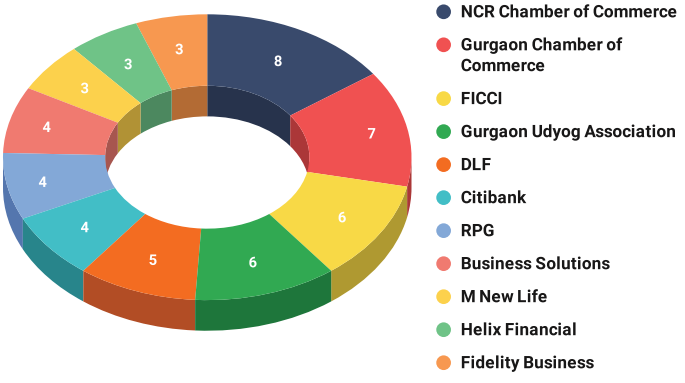
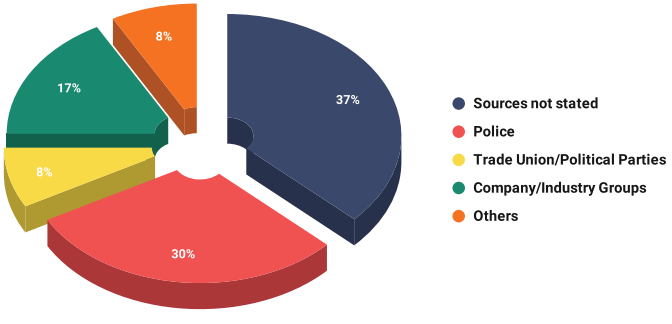


Chart 12: Nature of the Sources

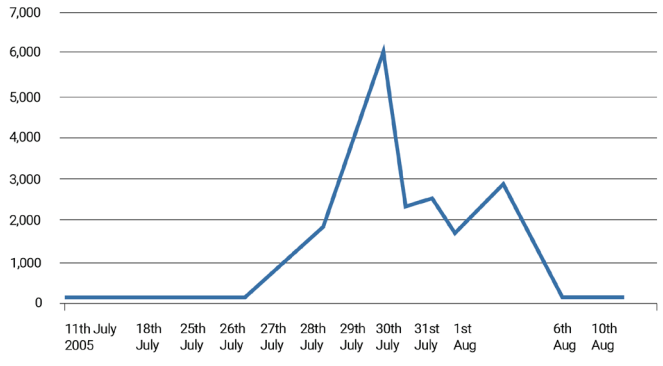


Coverage Progression

Even though the conflict between the workers and the HMSI was more than eight months old, media coverage began only with the police lathi-charge of 25 July 2005. The next day's paper had 1,115 sq cm dedicated to the coverage, with a 325 sq cm report and a graphic photograph on the front page of the paper of workers being thrashed. The coverage shot up to 6,170 cm^2 on the next day, with the issue being raised in Parliament. When the Left parties made rounds to meet Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Sonia Gandhi, Chairperson of the ruling UPA coalition, the Delhi-dateline stories of correspondents covering political beats were also around the Gurgaon issue. In two days, when an inquiry was declared, the coverage reduced dramatically

to 568 cm^2, finally marking "no coverage" on 1 August 2005, one week after the lathi-charge.

Chart 13: Coverage of the Gurgaon Class Conflict for the 31 Days Analysed



QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

The quantitative content analysis has shown that the coverage of the Honda conflict lasted only for a week, beginning from 26 July 2005. Barring a letter to the editor on 6 August 2005, 99.97 percent of the total coverage (14, 238 cm^2 of 14,280 cm^2) happened in the six days after the police lathi-charge on the workers.

Hence, it is quite evident that if there was a single denominator on what created the news in this class conflict, it was "violence." During the period when there was no violence (from December 2004 to 25 July 2005), there was no coverage in *The Times of India* on the conflict.

On the first day of the coverage, *The Times of India* was lenient to the victims of the violence, the workers who were lathi-charged. The report on *The Times of India* front-page on 26 July 2005, titled "Cops go berserk, thrash workers black and blue," bylined by Times News Network—TNN—and datelined Gurgaon, displayed a graphic photograph of police violence with men in uniform thrashing dozens of workers with long cane batons, accompanied by a report. Without quoting any administration, company or labour sources, the report tried to strike a balance with eyewitness accounts and what was by then established by the television coverage. The report said, "Trouble broke out when the workers, staging a protest march, were confronted by police in the Civil

Lines area. On being held back, the workers injured a deputy superintendent of police and set fire to the SDM's vehicle. This acted as a trigger for the police to unleash massive retaliatory violence." Attributing to eyewitnesses, the report continued, "The policemen were not so much interested in dispersing the mob, as to thrash the workers black and blue by ringing them from all sides. It appears the initial violence was difficult for the police to stomach and it was determined to teach the workers a lesson. The report also prominently displayed the reaction from the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and UPA Chairperson Sonia Gandhi—both expressed their 'anguish and concern'."

However, by the second day, the coverage moved away from the workers' angle to the political fallout and elaborating the viewpoints of the police and industry. On 27 July 2005, in the front-page report, titled "Gurgaon brings Left and BJP together," the paper reported on how the Parliament was disturbed by the members of the Left parties and BJP. With the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha being disturbed, Delhi-dateline stories found prominence over Gurgaon-dateline reports.

Also gaining prominence were stories on the Honda factory announcing a temporary halt on production, citing security-related issues, and on Japan's envoy to India saying the violence could hurt FDI inflow from Japan. On the front page, a report titled "Haryana may lose its lustre as FDI destination" said, "Japanese companies based in Gurgaon have gone into a huddle, following the Monday's incident. Sources said a group of Japanese CEOs also held a close-door meeting in the Capital."

Most Japanese vehicle manufacturers in India chose to keep silent. This report was attributed to "investment advisors," though none were named. The report further said "Smaller Japanese firms which are planning fresh ventures may settle for less aggressive states in the South, analysts said. Vikram Kirloskar, who had a joint venture with Toyota, said the incident would make Japanese investors more cautious." These industry viewpoints, which were absent in the reporting on the first day of the coverage, had gained greater prominence by the second day in *The Times of India* and the focus of the coverage shifted to industry's concerns, from workers' concerns and the brutal police lathi-charge.

Along with the industry reactions there was more fear and speculation in the media on how the stock market would react. The weeks

running up to the event of violence at Honda factory were vital in the history of the Bombay Stock Exchange. For the first time ever, the Sensex had crossed 7,000 points at the BSE in early July 2005. It crossed 7,500 points on the day of the violence at Honda. The main driver was the funds brought in by the foreign money managers, especially Japanese investors. On the day of violence in Gurgaon, with a Mumbai dateline, *The Times of India* had a lead report on the *Business Times* page titled: "Japanese pull: Sensex tops 7500"—ironically, that day the Mumbai Sensex gained the highest finish in history, while a Japanese firm in Gurgaon was in the middle of a class conflict.

SEBI data showed how integral foreign institutional investment was to the Indian market at that point of time. On the previous Friday (22 July 2005), net FII buying was a tad over Rs 1,000 crore (USD 239 million), taking the month's total inflows past USD 1.5 billion and the net inflows up to 2005 July to over USD 6 billion. These were all considered to be a vote of confidence of the foreign fund managers and the Japanese were highly credited for the Indian Sensex reaching the big figures.

But, early the next day (Wednesday, 27 July 2005), news of the Honda violence affected the market. The financial market worried the incident would crumble the confidence of foreign fund managers regarding investing in India. Adding to it was the statement of the Japanese ambassador Yasukoni Enoki saying the incident could affect FDI into India. The fear in Mumbai was manifested in Delhi with the Ministry of External Affairs and the prime minister speaking out to assure FIIs.

The Ministry of External Affairs spoke categorically, assuring investors about India's safe investment climate. *The Times of India* report on 27 July 2005, titled "MEA allays investor fears," began a 42 sq cm report with these lines: "India scotched any disquiet that appeared to be spiralling out of Monday's incident … An isolated incident involving a labour dispute should not become a benchmark for judging the investment climate in India. And the legal interest of foreign investors will be safeguarded." The prime minister also spoke out, setting aside the fear of a growing market and reiterated the country's political will and commitment to "growth."

Along with the high representation of the business side of the conflict, the front-page stories on the second day also used many unan-

imous police sources, but hardly any worker's source. The lead story on the front page said the workers were very violent, and acted like a "mob," forcing the police to have no option other than to strike back. It also quoted senior police officers saying, "The operation was strictly under the boundaries of the law." But the photographs carried in the newspaper and Gurgaon dateline reports of the previous day suggested otherwise. For example, a photograph was displayed inside the paper, showing a woman police inspector pulling a woman worker's hair with one hand and hitting her head with a lathi, at the civil hospital at Gurgaon—an obvious record of police brutality.

When the space of industry and police versions gained momentum on the second day of the coverage, the workers' side was represented in a 72 sq cm space, on page 2. It was titled "HMSI punishing us for forming union," and quoted the leader of the HMSI Workers Union, Suresh Gaur. Most of the Gurgaon-dateline stories on the second day were from the reporters stationed at the Civil Hospital, but were relegated to page 2, while the industry and police stories were datelined from Delhi and found space on the front page. Thousands of relatives assembled outside the Civil Hospital to see the workers. There were no details on where the workers were taken, and this created panic and led to scuffles with the police. In an on-the-ground report on 27 July 2005, titled "Violence, Anger, Grief at Hospital," reporters Avjit Ghosh and Neha Tyagi reported an incident where a relative grabbed the District Collector by the collar. It reported:

> *But none seized the moment better than the rather aptly named Veermati, a tough woman on the edge looking for her brother Khushi Ram who pounced on Gurgaon district collector Sudhir Rajpal and grabbed him by the collar. "She was a little agitated," said Rajpal on phone in the evening. But the therapy seemed to work. Before the day was out, Ram was found in Sohna hospital where some injured workers were sent for treatment.*

This was the only incident reported in the newspaper, out of numerous such scuffles involving victims' relatives attempting to find out where their relatives were taken; the detention of workers; torture of leaders, which are documented in the court records, but largely missing from the newspaper.

None of the reports gave any hint the journalists visited the police lock-ups, jails, or hospitals other than the Civil Hospital. The bail application records, accessed from the Court of KC Sharma, Additional Sessions Judge, Gurgaon (2005) states the workers were taken to Manesar Thana (294 people), Sadar Thana (384 people), Sohna Thana (150 people), Sector 29 Thana (number not known), CIA Thana (number not known), Sector 14 Thana (number not known), DLF Thana (number not known), and City Thana (number not known). Some of them even complained of having been tortured and put in wooden coffins, including Rajendra Pattak, the advocate who had been representing the workers in their cases before the Deputy Labour Commissioner.[4] The torture in the police lock-ups and the plight of workers at various hospitals hardly found space in the coverage.

The closest to providing any details of the plight of the hundreds of workers in the police lock-ups or hospitals was a report on 28 July 2005, titled, "With a broken arm he sought relief." By-lined Neha Tyagi, the report profiled a worker, Sandeep Kumar Saini. The following is an excerpt from the report:

> *For Saini, joining Honda Motorcycles and Scooters India (HMSI) was a dream come true as he "never wanted to sit in his father's sweet shop" in his home town, Yamuna Nagar. But little did he imagine he will have to pay a price for dreaming big, barely three months of his joining. Recalling the incident he said: "I was sitting along with other colleagues at the Mini Secretariat when the police attacked the crowd. The first lathi hit me on my back and as I bent down I could see the lathi coming towards my head. My arm got fractured when I tried to block and save my head." But that was not the end, rather the beginning. He added: "I was then taken to DLF thana where I complained that my arm is paining, but instead of taking me to the hospital the policemen hit me again on the same arm saying 'naatak mat kar, hum tera baaju tor denge' (do not act smart, we will break your arm)."*

This was the only report in the period analysed that was letting the human side of the story (akin to advancing the personal narrative as stipulated by Tom Wolfe's New Journalism school or narrative journal-

ism).[5]

Contrasting with such reporting were stories that bordered on personal opinion and speculation. In a report titled "Was Monday's incident engineered?" Payal Saxena began her first graph thus:

> *Even as the Gurgaon police on Wednesday admitted that it overreacted after provocations by the protesters at Honda Motors & Scooters India, rumours were doing rounds that the chaos was in fact engineered by a particular political party.*

The report did not mention the name of "the particular political party" and attributed its source to "rumours," without any further information, quotes, or reportage. It did not even say where the reporter heard the rumours; neither did she try to check it against any verifiable facts.

In many instances, the headlines were misleading; the body of the report discussed issues entirely different from the headline. A New Delhi-Gurgaon shared dateline report, titled "Attack on DSP led to police crackdown," showed hardly any original reporting to substantiate the argument and was quick to unearth the reason behind the crackdown, solely going by the police side of the conflict. The report—without a byline, but under the authorship of Times News Network—said the workers singled out the police officer, Jag Pravesh, a DSP, and that provoked the police to attack the workers. The report, however, did not provide any evidence or cite or quote anyone in substantiation. Rather, the story had general opinionated comments like this: "It [the incident] has provided a sharp edge to the 'anti-MNC reforms' political narrative of the Left, affording an opportunity to organised labour to flex its political arm." The report also called the conflict a "routine police-public clash."

However, one report was critical of the police. It did not quote any police or union sources, but referred to the law and police manuals. Titled "Police act defied its own rulebook," it referred to the police manual in Haryana, which derived its guidelines from the Punjab Police Rules, 1934. This said the police should use force consistent with whatever was required to disperse the assembly. The key was to maintain a balance keeping in mind that the people in the mob were not enemies. Along with the colonial law of Punjab Police Rules, 1934, the Haryana Police Manual also keeps the law enshrined in the century-and-a-half-old

Police Act of 1861 and the Criminal Procedure Code, 1973 as a framework for action. "The police should use force only when it becomes an utmost necessity as the slightest slip may result in putting the citizens in grave danger," the report, bylined by Vishwa Mohan, said, quoting the law.

The Times of India editorial on 27 July 2005 also took a firm position against the police atrocities and criticised the colonial mindset of the police. Titled "Police the Police," the editorial said, "Police have no business to behave like thugs even if people, in this case unarmed strikers, transgress the 'limits' of peaceful protest. Prompt action should be taken against the errant policemen. What Gurgaon witnessed on Monday is symptomatic of a larger malaise threatening our policing mechanism. As an institution, Indian police continues to be ruled by a colonial mindset." Interestingly, the editorial was evidently partisan to the workers' cause, to the extent of condemning the police brutality and did not even mention the Honda company's or India Inc.'s interest. This would give the impression that, in its editorial, *The Times of India* stood with the workers' side of the conflict but favoured the police and business side of the conflict in its reporting.

But the editorial position also changed by the next day, when more news surfaced on how the Honda conflict could affect foreign investment in India.

The newspaper ran a second editorial on 28 July 2005, corresponding with the general trend in reporting in the later days, seeing the issue more from the industry's point of view. In the editorial titled "Reality Check; don't get hysterical about Gurgaon, learn from Bengal," the paper criticised Left leaders for blaming the multinationals. The editorial argued:

> *Leaders of the CPM are muttering darkly about how capitalism — and multinationals — oppress the working class. Before shrillness drowns out reason, here is a reality check. It is pointless to blame foreign investment (FDI), multinationals or the Japanese for what happened in Gurgaon. India's experience with FDI has been overwhelmingly positive for employees, shareholders and institutions. Reforms in many areas, including infrastructure and capital markets, have been driven by the demands of overseas investors. Across sectors, multination-*

> *als have boosted wages and improved the quality of manpower management: witness the rush to join multinational employers during campus placements. Are the Japanese any different?*

The only opinion piece related to the Honda conflict, titled "China's Chairman, Our Chairman," was written by Saugata Roy, a Trinamool Congress leader. The op-ed took the unique position of detaching the workers' interest in Gurgaon from than that of the Left parties. Citing several examples, Roy argued the Left had double standards: wherever the Left parties were in opposition, they spoke about workers' rights, while in Bengal it was desperately safeguarding foreign investments. The article began:

> *After striking Honda workers were beaten by Haryana policemen and politicians from the Left began to mutter about the perfidy of multinationals, Bengal's industry minister Nirupam Sen announced that the Japanese were great employers and had an excellent track record in Bengal. So, Japanese ambassador Yasukuni Enoki can rest easy. Gurgaon isn't Bengal, where the Japanese are investing aggressively.*

Roy said even after 30 years of Left rule, the wages of north Bengal's tea plantation workers were the least in the country, even lower than Assam.

"Japan's Mitsubishi Corporation which invested in a Rs 2,000-odd crore petrochemicals plant in the state has been operating without losing a single man-day since its inception," he said. Roy's opinion piece fell short of taking any sides in the workers' conflict at the Honda factory in Gurgaon, but criticised Left parties and their lack of sincerity on class conflicts in general.

Out of 78 letters in 31 days analysed, only two letters were about the Gurgaon conflict. Both the letters, "Beastly Police," on 29 July 2005 and "Haryana Shame" on 6 August 2005, spoke out against police atrocities on the workers.

The letter titled, "Haryana Shame" said:

> *Time and again the Indian police has shown that its attitude is not very different from that of British rulers. Recently five*

> *farmers were shot in Rajasthan for demanding water. In Delhi, four call centre employees being chased by goons were humiliated by the police because they dialled 100 at a time the police thought was inconvenient. Now in Gurgaon, the way the police beat up workers reminded me of pre-Independence India. Can I request* TOI, *which gave so much space to the death of an innocent Brazilian at the hands of London police, to highlight what the Indian police does daily — violate human rights. — Digvijay Singh Ankoti, via e-mail.*

Interestingly enough, only the two letters to the editor and the first editorial discussed the issue in the light of similar conflicts or structural issues, and hinted at the need to see the police force as an extension of a colonial one and hence needing to be "de-colonised."

But the newspaper was interested in promoting another debate. On the feature section on the next Sunday—31 July 2005—*The Times of India* published results of a survey they conducted. The full-page was titled "Flashpoint; Is Delhi's 'Super Suburb' Actually a Seething Volcano?" The question asked was would the Honda violence affect Gurgaon's image. Eighty-eight percent respondents said "No," and the remaining 12 percent said, "Yes."

The choices of which questions to ask and which socioeconomic group to interview highlight the editorial intention, which is to prove the hypothesis of the feature report. Rather than provide a neutral platform to public opinion, such reporting practices shape the nature and direction of readers' response, and thereby the public debate at large.

Equally misleading were the factual errors in the reporting. The report on 26 July 2005 titled "Gurgaon mayhem" and sub-titled "Company claims 'outside elements' causing rift" said the workers' conflict was a fortnight old and had been asking for higher wages in light of improved company performance. The management claimed it had reached an agreement with workers but added "outside elements" were still "misleading" them. However, the labour court documents, workers' affidavits and citizen committee reports show otherwise.

The conflict between the workers and the company management was several months—not a fortnight—old. Several incidents occurred in a span of time, and finally culminated in the workers' agitation. However,

none of these developments found media space in the press. Nor did any reports published in the context of the violence, explain such build-ups in the preceding months.

These were some such incidents:

- A top Japanese manager misbehaving with the workers and complaints amounting to racial treatment were documented in the court records: incidents such as harming the workers with a hammer and iron rods, snatching the turban of a Sikh worker, and misbehaving with women.[6] There was even a report of the Japanese manager, Hiroshi Simizu, using the ladies' toilet frequently. When the workers complained, they were told, "In Japan both men and women bathe in the same toilet. If you've to work in a Japanese factory, you will have to work the way they work in Japan."[7]
- The workers said how the management deliberately isolated and discriminated against them on the basis of their linguistic and regional identity and how this stopped them forming any workers' solidarity.[8]
- Citizen's Committee documented the inhuman conditions under which the contractual laborers worked. "Around 2,000 workers had to sleep in the same hall, that had very little fresh air."[9]
- The factory had made hundreds of workers sign on blank pages, which is not legal. The management lured the workers, offering them salary hikes. But a couple of workers, named Harjeet Singh and Vinod Tiwari, opposed this. Tiwari even asked the management to return the blank papers of his colleagues.
- Since the company refused it, the workers observed a token hunger strike on 7 and 8 February 2005 in protest. They skipped lunch, but worked and met their targets. Again, facing a management unmoved by such acts, the workers resolved to form a union. The workers chose seven people—Suresh Gaur, Chand Tikar, Vinod Tiwari, Safeeque, Sujinder Singh, Kundan Mehta and Harjeet Singh. They registered the union under the name, HMSI Workers' Union.[10]

- However, the company did not recognise the union. In May 2005, the workers were on strike once again to make themselves heard. They worked and finished the targets, but during lunch they sat in the canteen without eating.[11]
- As a response to this, the management put up a notice stating if the workers did not eat lunch they would have to pay Rs. 25. The arrangement was that for lunch the workers used to contribute Rs. 6 and the management Rs. 19. So if they refused to eat, the management will not pay its share for lunch and the entire amount will be deducted from the worker's salary.
- An affidavit before the Justice GC Garg Commission of Inquiry says that "whenever there was any difference of opinion between the management of the company and the workers, there was heavy presence of armed goondas and henchmen who threatened the workers individually and compelled them to toe the line which suited the management."[12]
- In the third week of June 2005, 35 trainees were asked to leave HMSI, despite its impressive growth rate. It was the first time in the five years of the existence of the company in India that trainees were not absorbed into the company. The newly formed workers' union took this issue upon itself. But the management categorically warned that the other trainees' plight would not be any different if they joined the union.[13]
- The union leader said they were tired of the negative response from HMSI. During the day of 25 June 2005, around 1,500 workers participated in a peaceful rally outside the factory. But on that night, five policemen and a dozen men in plain clothes took them away from their houses and detained them in police custody, after allegedly torturing them.[14, 15]
- Two days later, on 27 June 2005, the company retrenched 2,700 workers. The reason for retrenchment was not stated.
    1. But the following day, the company agreed to take the workers on duty if they agreed to sign an under-

taking, however the content of this was not told to the workers. At this point, some workers were blaming the union for losing their jobs and the union leaders took a back foot and agreed to sign the papers, they just wanted their jobs back.

- When the workers agreed to sign the undertaking, the company changed their mind. The management kept the gates of the factory locked and did not allow the workers to enter the premises.
- From 28 June 2005 onwards, the retrenched workers sat 100 metres away from the factory, demanding their jobs back. This continued for two weeks and there was no response from the company.
- On 11 July 2005, the Honda workers organised a demonstration at Kamla Nehru Park. Workers of other factories in Gurgaon joined them in solidarity; it was a gathering of around 12,000 people. They demanded that someone from the government come and collect their complaint at the park, since Section 144 of IPC (banning any assembly) was declared around the government offices. The chief of the district administration, the District Collector, came to the park and received the memorandum, assuring redress.[16]
- The negotiations since then were tripartite—the labour officer, management and the HMSI Workers Union. The company offered to take the workers back in batches of 1,200. But this first agreement was found to be unilaterally changed by the company when it gave an advertisement, in the Chandigarh edition of the *Dainik Tribune* newspaper, on 16 July 2005. The advertisement said, "the Company has agreed to take back workers in batches of 400, but the workers are not coming as they are on strike." It even published the identity numbers of the workers in the paper.
- When the workers reached in batches of 400, the management wanted the workers to sign an undertaking to maintain good conduct, meet production targets and not raise any further demands for a specified period.

- On 22 July 2005, the company took back only 100 workers, back-tracking from their commitment for 400. According to the Labor Conciliation Officer, SK Gupta, "Reason given by the management was that the previous day the workers had forcefully hoisted the flag and they were not convinced in taking the workers in big groups like 400." The proposal from the company then was taking the workers from the batches in 100s. But the workers did not agree to this. The Labor Conciliation Officer who mediated the talks said, "I continued to visit the place outside the factory everyday where the workers sat in protest. I told them they should agree to what the management said as that would help in maintaining peace. On 23 July, the workers agreed to go in batches of 100. Now the management refused again. They said that we would only take the workers when all the issues are settled, the main ones being: a) dismissed workers will not be reinstated, b) proceedings against the suspended workers will be completed and c) the Union will not put up any demand for the next three years. On this, the negotiation talks broke once again."[17]
- The workers went on a roadblock on the evening of 23 July 2005. They blocked the National Highway from 6 pm to 10 pm. The police registered two cases against this but arrested none.
- On 25 July 2005, the day of the police lathi-charge on the workers, about 4,000 workers assembled at the Kamla Nehru Park in Gurgaon to show solidarity with the dismissed HMSI workers. Out of this, about 3,000 workers were from HMSI and the remaining from other companies in Gurgaon. By noon, the workers marched to the D.C. office to hand over a memorandum. But the march was blocked by the police and the workers and police indulged in a scuffle. Soon, the DC reached the spot, met union leaders and told them he was willing to meet with the workers and take the memorandum from them at the mini-secretariat. The workers expected this meeting to be just like 11 July, when the DC and the SP personally took the memorandum from the workers.[18]

- While the workers were waiting, hundreds of police personnel in riot combat gear surrounded the ground. Sudhir Rajpal, the DC, dressed in riot police gear with lathi in his hand stood with the men in uniform. A Hindi newspaper, *Navbharat Times*, published the photograph of the DC leading the riot police from front. He waved to the workers to keep sitting. Soon, the police started lathi-charge on the sitting workers from different directions on the ground. The boundary wall of the mini secretariat and the secretariat building were too tall for the workers to jump over. Escaping from the lathi-charge was near impossible. These developments/details of the conflict hardly found space in the newspaper reporting of *The Times of India*, let alone the more contextual facts of class conflicts at large.

The media reported the Honda violence as an isolated incident; it failed to observe and report a pattern of labour violence in Gurgaon. Such a pattern of labour violence emerged with Gurgaon's growth as an industrial town in the preceding years of the violence at the Honda factory. The post-liberalisation period witnessed scores of foreign companies choosing Gurgaon to set up their industrial operations. By the beginning of the new millennium, Gurgaon, a little-known Haryana village, transformed into a robust satellite city of Delhi. New companies brought with them new sets of labour relations and management principles. Often, because of the tax sops and the warm welcome they were offered, the companies did not adhere to the labour laws, increasing the tension between the companies and workers.

CONCLUSION

Taking such factors into account, these conclusions can be drawn:

The media coverage received for the class conflict at Honda factory was lopsided.

The class interests of the capital class get more coverage than of the workers (Chart 3 E).

Often media coverage starts only when the movement turns violent, completely blacking out the developments that led to the violent protests, and the larger context of the conflict.

It is imperative to draw a few important points, for instance, how the characteristic of the media coverage of a class conflict such as the workers' agitation at the Honda factory reflected the characteristics of a state that was promoting the influx of the private capital at the cost of the workers rights. There was very little interest in the state also in such case to be fair, and often spoke in defence, and at times in fear of the foreign investment fleeing, that the workers' protests were regarded in the media coverage as "unacceptable," "obstructionist," "old-fashioned," and "anti- progress" etc. as opposed to being inclusive and representing their versions in equitable measure.

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HOW VIJAYAVANI AND ANDOLANA REPORTED A PROTEST AGAINST THE EVICTION OF ADIVASIS FROM THE NAGARAHOLE NATIONAL PARK

/Meljo Thomas Karakunnel

ABSTRACT

In March 2021, several tribal, or Adivasi, communities launched a protest against the forest department and the government's plan to evict them from the Nagarahole National Park. This researcher chose to analyse the media coverage—or the lack of it—that the protestors received. The researcher looked at Vijayavani, *and* Andolana*—the two most circulated Kannada newspapers in the Mysuru region of Karnataka, the nearest city to the National Park. It analyses reports from 17 March to 15 May 2021, the active period of the resistance.*

This study includes interviews with protest leaders and government officials to gauge their views on the issue. Surprisingly, Vijayavani *carried no news on the Adivasi protest or any related stories from 17 March 2021, though it published 4200 news reports during the analysis period. The reports about the Adivasi protest appeared only twice in the regional page in* Andolana, *which published around 4800 news reports during the analysis period. With the local Kannada*

press paying scant attention to the protest, the analysis raises the vital question of what the place of the forest-dependent communities—mostly illiterate, living inside the forests—is the imagination of the fourth estate in India.

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CASE STUDY

According to one of the mythologies of the Jenu Kuruba tribe, which inhabited the Nagarahole National Park and Tiger Reserve area for several generations, the first man and woman sprang from a burude—bitter gourd. When the world was destroyed by a great flood, one burude survived, floated and eventually settled on a piece of land. This tribe is one of several communities—including the Betta Kurubas, Paniya Eravas, Soligas and Malekudiyas—to have suffered the consequences of the legal acquisition of major Adivasi lands for developmental as well as wildlife-protection activities. In some senses, this process has left their lives in a situation that resembles that of the floating burude.

Approximately twenty thousand Adivasi people were evicted from their *jammas*—hamlets—in the Nagarahole and Bandipur tiger reserves after the enactment of the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972. In 2006, the enactment of the Forest Rights Act gave forest-dwelling communities an opportunity to claim their ancestral forest lands on an individual or community basis. A little over a decade later, India's government-sponsored tiger-conservation authority directed states not to allot land rights to Adivasis and forest dwellers living in tiger reserves, stating that they posed a danger to wildlife. The Supreme Court, on 13 February 2019, ordered the eviction of 1,10,000 Adivasi and Scheduled Tribe households across India, thereby rejecting their claims over ancestral forest land under the FRA, which dictates that traditional forest dwellers should not be shunted out of the forest without their consent. Forest-dwelling communities in Nagarahole had submitted the necessary applications for the grant of their forest rights, but they were denied the benefit for more than a decade and a half. (By contrast, the forest department facilitates safaris and forest stays in the Nagarahole Tiger Reserve.)

The government and the forest department spoke of the rehabilitation of these communities as "voluntary," but the Adivasis revealed that it was, in fact, "forced." A study by the organisation Fridays For Future Karnataka found that the relocation was a "forced eviction": tribal people who had relocated disclosed that the forest guards had threatened and harassed them, destroyed their crops and even planted teak on forest land that was formerly used by Adivasi communities for cultivation, in order to compel them to leave their jammas.

Tribal Communities in India and the Indian Constitution

In India, Adivasis—an umbrella term including people of various ethnic groups who settled in the Indian subcontinent before Aryans—are recognised as "Scheduled Tribes" under Article 342, Clause 9 (i) of the Constitution. At present, 258 of 543 Adivasi communities across 17 states, who speak 106 different languages and 216 subsidiary languages, have been enlisted as Scheduled Tribes. They are given educational, economic, political and developmental safeguards under the Constitution.

According to the 2011 Census of India, the tribal population of the country is 10,42,81,034—8.6 percent of the gross population—and 89.97 percent of tribal communities live in rural areas. This is an estimated increase of 23.7 percent from the 2001 Census figures. There was also a 49.7 percent increase in the urban tribal population in 2011, in contrast to the 21.3 percent increase in the rural tribal population, pointing towards displacement and migration to urban areas.

A majority of India's tribal population is concentrated in the eastern, central and western belts, whereas the southern part of the country accommodates about five percent of the total Scheduled Tribe population. According to the Karnataka State Tribal Research Institute, Adivasi communities constitute 6.99 percent of the gross population of the state, and eight of ten people in this community tend to live in the rural areas.[1] Fourteen of the 50 tribal communities living in the state are considered to be "original" natives and two communities—Jenu Kuruba and Koraga—are considered to be "primitive" natives. Jenu Kurubas are the primary inhabitants of the Nagarahole forest area, along with communities, such as the Kadu Kurubas, Marakudiyas, Yeravas and Soligas. The Indian government follows an integration and progressive acculturation policy to incorporate these communities into the mainstream.

Forest Acts – a contextual history

The Indian Forest Act of 1927, a British-era law, declared vast areas of inhabited land to be reserves or protected forest areas. Consequently, the longstanding inhabitants of these lands were turned into "encroachers," who were then denied rights over the land they inhabited. Later, the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972 converted forest reserves across the country into national parks, causing the forceful eviction of

forest dwellers without a compensatory rehabilitation plan.

The Forest Rights Act of 2006 was enacted to address this act of injustice against forest-dwelling communities. As per this act, the tribal people who inhabit and cultivate a piece of forest land since 2005 are entitled to have a *patta*—land title—over the same. The same rights were rendered to other traditional forest dwellers, provided that they were residing on the land for more than three generations or a period of 75 years. Besides individuals, communities were also eligible for the right to use forest land. The FRA aimed to better their lives by certifying the right of at least a hundred and fifty million people to dwell and live off about forty million hectares of forest area. It also approved the sanctioning of houses to forest-dwelling communities within forest limits.

However, when the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government which passed the historic 2006 Act lost power nationally, this perspective changed. The Modi government, which replaced it, preferred the draconian colonial-era approach, and the bureaucracy got more policing powers. The majority of the forest-land rights (especially the community land rights) applications were rejected on the basis of an inability by many to produce documents. Shifts in cultivation methods, three decades of eviction, physical harassment, the continuous destruction of cultivation and the restrictions imposed on collecting forest produce for livelihood (engendered by Wildlife Protection Act, 1972) should be read in connection with this. In general, the inability of forest dwellers to produce evidence showing their inheritance of forest land cost them dearly, as scores of individual as well as community claims were rejected by the committees.

Survival International, a movement working for the recognition of tribal rights and their dignity, termed the conservation policies followed across the globe as racist.[2] India is hardly an exception for following a model that believes in people-free conservation. This model was visible in the establishment of Yellowstone and Yosemite National Parks in the nineteenth century in the United States, for instance, which infamously caused the eviction of Native Americans from national parks.

Tribal Communities in Nagarahole National Park

The Nagarahole national park is home to major "particularly vulnerable

tribal groups" residing within its limits, including the Jenu Kurubas, Betta Kurubas, Kadu Kurubas, Paniya Eravas, Soligas and Malekudiyas. A total population of 6,579 people belonging to 1,703 families live in 45 tribal settlements, or *haadis*, across the reserve. The tribal people's original habitat, or *jamma*, was spread across 1,500 to 3,000 acres of land, from where they collected non-timber forest products, including honey, bamboo, tamarind and so on for their livelihood.[3]

Spread over two districts in Karnataka, Mysuru and Kodagu, the national park is home to various wild animals, including the tiger, the leopard, wild dog, sloth bear and the Asiatic Elephant. It also has over three hundred species of flora and fauna. Nagarahole Tiger Reserve is also part of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve, which, at 5,520 square kilometres, is one of the oldest and largest conservation areas in the world. According to the Tiger Status Report 2018, there are 164 tigers in Nagarahole Tiger Reserve, and it has the third-highest population density of tigers in the country after Corbett and Kaziranga tiger reserves—11.82 per 100 square kilometre. Karnataka is also home to an estimated number of 524 tigers, the second highest number for a state after Madhya Pradesh.

Evacuation gained particular momentum in recent times. According to the government of Karnataka, seven hundred of two thousand tribal families living inside the Nagarahole and BR Hills forests were rehabilitated. Around twenty thousand tribal people were relocated to places such as Nagapura, Sheetihally-Lakpatna, Sollepura and Masthigudi from the reserve alone. However, 812 families still live in the park, since they refused to accept the government's rehabilitation package. The tribal community's members are mostly illiterate, have very few resources in technological and economic terms, and are facing depopulation.[4] Some of them live on grains grown in the forest, including honey and other collected forest goods, or work as mahouts for the forest department. Access to media or the judicial system is almost nil.

The protest

The protest began on 17 March 2021, with over six thousand Adivasis participating. Protestors gathered outside the local forest ranger's office, declaring that the state government and the forest department, with the support of the wildlife-conservation society, have been evicting them

from their land to further ecotourism and mint money. They demanded the proper effectuation of the Forest Rights Act's recognition of their right over the land. The protest went on for about two months, though it had lost momentum by the time the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic hit India. After two months even the negotiation talks with the authorities had petered out.

Selected Newspapers

The study focused on analysing the coverage, in the two most circulated Kannada newspapers in the Mysore region—*Vijayavani* and *Andolana*. The period studied was 17 March to 15 May 2021.

Both the newspapers are broadsheets, with dimensions of 600 mm × 750 mm. They carry between nine and twelve pages, and are sold at a proportionate price ranging from Rs. 4.00-6.00. *Vijayavani* typically publishes three stories and teasers each on the front page, whereas *Andolana*, in addition to the two stories, covers one brief national and international news story. *Vijayavani* has a readership of 551,994 compared to *Andolana*'s 250,000. *Vijayavani* was established in 2012 by the VRL group owned by Vijay Sankeshwar, a former BJP MP from Dharwad. By contrast, *Andolana* was launched in Mysore in 1972 by Rajashekhar Koti, a renowned socialist politician and journalist in Karnataka.

Newspaper Coverage of the Protest

Vijayavani distinguishes itself by publishing not a single news report of the protest of the Adivasis trying to stop eviction, though it published 4200 stories during the period analysed.

In contrast, *Andolana* published two articles.

ANDOLANA				
Date	Page: front/ regional/edi- torial	Headline focus	News angle	Story focus
29.03.21	Regional	Ajjikuttira Pon- nanna (Con- gress spokes- person) visits protestors.	Writes of pro- test on a posi- tive note. Gives prominence to the politician's visit.	12 days since the protest began. The first report is because the politician Pon- nanna visits the protestors.
30.03.21	Regional	Will Adivasis get justice? More than 12 days have passed and there is silence from government officials.	Explains the issues faced by Adivasis, as well as the environ- mental hazards that will occur if the land is used to grow trees which will eventually create income for the govern- ment.	Story speaks against the gov- ernment policy and its reper- cussions. Talks about human rights violations of the Adivasis.

Notably, the first report on 29 March was not about the protest as such, but appeared due to the open support delivered by Ajjikuttira Ponnanna, a leader of the Congress party, and his presence at the protest.

The second half-page story in the regional page detailed the issues faced by the protestors under the headline "Will adivasis get justice?" Criticising the government policy and its repercussions, the story takes more of a human-rights angle. Therefore, the protests, their challenge of colonial concepts of conservation, and their advocacy of co-existence between forest-dwellers and the environment they inhabit, received only scant attention from the media, especially from the regional dailies that this study analysed.

The case analysed is conspicuous for the complete lack of coverage (*Vijayavani*), and the minimal coverage (*Andolana*). It might be true the social prejudice in Indian society—which makes issues faced by people in the peripheries, such as Adivasis living in the forests trying to stop forced eviction, a nonissue for news media—might have come into the play. *Vijayavani* has hundreds of journalists working in it, and offices across the state of Karnataka, but it did not find it worthwhile to report the protest, or the underlying issue of the forest act and its gradual dilution. The editorial and publishing office of the Mysuru edition of *Vijayavani* is less than two hours from the forest.

In contrast, *Andolana*, started in the early 1970s by a journalist-turned-socialist politician, has given space for two reports, both created by the visit of an Opposition leader. If the Opposition leader had chosen not to visit the protestors, as is evident from the news-peg, the chances are that *Andolana* also would have missed it.

The kind of things the media ignored:

When a case study such as this looks into the inclusiveness of a vital constituency of people—in this case, the forest-dependent Adivasi people and their longstanding livelihood issues—the focus unfortunately turns into the lack of coverage, as opposed to problems in the coverage. As explained earlier in the paper, we can see by paying attention to the substantial issues faced by the community, it was certainly not for a lack of material that the media, especially *Vijayavani*, chose not to give it any coverage at all. Below is a list of developments that would have certainly merited coverage in the Kannada papers, but the papers either chose not to cover it at all, or not to cover to the satisfaction of the protesting Adivasi communities or putting forward their livelihood issues.

1. The Kannada newspapers paid no interest to the context, to how systematically the injustice was done to the Adivasi communities facing eviction. The 2006 Act was supposed to give them rights to land, but instead, the plates were turned around, and now they are facing eviction from their natural habitat against their will. Media did not pay attention to this. The Adivasi leaders even fear that the Modi government aims to transfer control of the forests to large cor-

porations and abolish the regulation that required anyone who wished to carry out development initiatives in forests to acquire the permission of the indigenous communities residing there. The eviction, according to them, was a way to prepare the ground for massive developmental projects, including mining, in the years to come. The media has chosen not to pay any attention to the change in the laws over the years, which has made it easier for the government to get an authority over the forest land at the expense of denying Adivasis their ancestral and legal rights.

2. The gradual and systemic harassments the tribal people dependent on the forest face is hardly in the news reports. The community faced constant persecution by forest guards. "They do not allow us to cultivate, construct huts or to conduct rituals and deny us the access to our ancestral graves," JK Thimma, the vice president of Rajyamoola Adivasigala Vedike, or Platform for Karnataka Adivasis, said. Cases were filed against six protestors, including Thimma. They have encountered violent assaults, death threats, false criminal charges, and the destruction of their lands and crops, the denial of basic amenities, including electricity and water, by the forest department and its security forces, such as the special tiger protection force—none of these incidents, according to the protestors, made it to the media. Leaders of the protest also questioned the notions of conservation that the government and other concerned authorities uphold. Shailendra said, "We are the real conservationists and protectors of Nagarahole's forests. The urban conservationists do not know the forest. Tigers are safe as long as we live along with them. The sooner we disappear the sooner there will be their disappearance too." Animal-human conflict was one of the stated reasons for the forest department's eviction of Adivasis, but the latter denied this argument. "We have our own self-defence mechanisms as we know the animal behaviour and so never disturbed the animal life in the forest," said Thimma, who spoke of their preference, like their ancestors, for continuing to live inside the forests.
3. According to one of the protest leaders, Shailendra JK, Ad-

ivasis in Karnataka overall submitted 92,000 applications seeking individual and community forest-land rights, of which only around six hundred were accepted over a decade. Besides demanding the implementation of the recommendations of the Assadi report, [5] the protestors rallied around issues such as forced eviction, and the distinct lack of clear rehabilitation plans. With tools such as the Right to Information Act, or even simply talking to the protestors and their leaders, the journalists would have gotten the necessary details about the kind of applications they moved seeking individual and community forest-land rights. The journalists chose to ignore this.

4. The protestors wrote to the US government, asking it to withdraw its support and funding for bodies such as the Wildlife Conservation Society, and other such unjust projects in India. It is worth considering that the state government, the forest department, the National Tiger Conservation Authority and the Wildlife Conservation Society find no issue with the construction of forest bungalows, camp offices or roads to facilitate ecotourism and forest safaris. They also submitted a complaint to the Indian prime minister, but this did not bring about a follow-up, and did not receive the attention of the media.
5. The media showed no sympathies to what, according to the Adivasis, are among their most precious things to lose if evicted from the forest: their customs, traditions, culture, local history and heritage. Shivu also spoke about how the relocation of forest-dwelling Adivasis over a hundred kilometres from the tiger reserve impacted them. "This was like destroying our beliefs, customs, traditions, roots, culture, history, language and in essence, our own identity," he said. Around eight hundred already relocated families want to go back to their ancestral lands in the forest and filed their claims under provisions allowed by the Forest Rights Act of 2006. However, the forest department insisted on seeing documents to prove their existence in the forest. None of the families have this kind of documentation. "Allow us to keep our culture and identity as forest dwellers and recog-

nise our right to live in, protect and conserve our ancestral forest lands through individual and community land rights as envisioned in FRA," Shivu added.

6. The media also failed to see the pattern of such protests. It was not the first time that Adivasi communities were protesting in recent times in this region. There were a series of protests against eviction that took place, but all were unsuccessful, and the protestors often did not manage to get any media attention, the leaders of the protest said.

Some of the protests before 2021 that failed to get media attention according to the protestors were these:

Sl No	Place	Year/Date	Reasons/ Demands	Protestors/ Participants
1	Diddalli in Virajpet taluk	8 December 2016	Eviction of 577 families by the forest department	822 families from Jenu Kuruba, Yerava, Panjara and other communities
2	Nagapura Tribal Rehabilitation Centre	27 January 2018	None of the promises made during the rehabilitation process, including 5-acre agricultural land per family, Rs. 1 lakh worth of development works and a reserved space of 100 hectares under community development, have been fulfilled. No Anganawadis and good schooling were provided but an inaugurated yet locked PHC.	Over two hundred tribal families were evicted from the forests in 1999
3	Kodagu	7-20 December 2016	Demolition of tribal huts inside the Kodagu reserved forest	577 Jenu Kuruba families of Diddihalli village of Madikeri

4	Nagarahole	2019	Demolition of tribal huts followed by the SC order	

CONCLUSION

The findings from this study must be interpreted in the context of the existing socioeconomic-political relationships among various stakeholders. In the case of eviction of the Adivasis from the Nagarahole National Park, the government, the forest department, political parties, the protesting Adivasi communites and media all come with their own respective perspectives and histories. In the case of media, it is understood that the coverage, in general, can be influenced by various factors, such as media ownership, political affiliations and audience preferences. Here, the first case studied, *Vijayavani*, is founded by an industrialist, who is also a prominent leader of the ruling party, the BJP. The protest of the Adivasis certainly had an anti-government politics to it. This researcher's efforts to get an answer from the newspaper management as to why it chose not to cover the protest at all failed to yield results. Unlike *Vijayavani*, the daily *Andolana*, with obvious socialist leanings, covered the protest when a local Congress party leader visited the protestors. Here as well, the orientation of the newspaper, even though the coverage was very minimal, must have been the reason.

This case study also points to the question of representation of people from diverse backgrounds in the news media. The literacy rate among the Adivasis was 53.9 per cent in 2011 census and it was the lowest among the forest-dwelling Adivasi communities, such as the Jenu Kuruba, Yeravas and Soligas. Notably, the surveyed dailies are rarely subscribed by the tribal people themselves, owing to their vulnerable educational and economic status and more than two thirds of women tribal people in Karnataka do not have access to newspapers, according to a 2015 study by Guru, Shivaraj, and Manasagangothri.[6] More pressingly, there are no journalists from these communities and their absence in news rooms might have contributed to the editorial decisions on matters that affect their lives.

It can be safely concluded from the case study undertaken that the fourth estate remained disengaged, and unapproachable for forest-de-

pendent communities such as the Adivasi people in Nagarhole facing forceful evictions from their ancestral homes. The system—from literacy percentage to media representation—stands as a Himalayan challenge for the community. The lack of sensitivity, and disinterest in the newsworthiness of the lives of Adivasis, is also evident in the case studied.

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ANALYSING DECCAN CHRONICLE'S COVERAGE OF THE CUSTODIAL DEATH OF A DALIT CHRISTIAN WOMAN IN TELANGANA

/ Jahnavi Uppuleti

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to investigate the Deccan Chronicle*'s reportage on the custodial death of Mariamma—a Dalit Christian woman, who faced brutal torture at the hands of the police, at the Addagudur police station in the Yadadri-Bhuvanagiri district in Telangana. Mariamma and her 21-year-old son, Uday, were taken into custody as suspects in a robbery.*

This study will try to understand the language, frequency of articles and perspectives taken into account during the reportage. The period ten days after Mariamma's death saw no direct reportage of the incident involving her; the first report was from the point-of-view of Bhatti Vikramarka, a Congress leader, demanding justice. Overall, the study found that the news reportage in the Deccan Chronicle *of the incident, during the period under study, was minimal, and did not look at most issues critically and elaborately, nor cover a broad range of POVs, such as that of Mariamma's family. Nor did it explicitly examine the police as violators during the phases analysed. It is also true that while the crime re-*

porters covered the police on a regular basis, the reporters started paying attention to the story many days later, when a leader in the Opposition party started raising the issue of the custodial death of the Dalit Christian woman.

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INTRODUCTION

According to the 2011 Indian census, the population of Indians in the Schedule Caste category is 201.4 million. The communities in the SC category are the former untouchables, also known as Dalits. As per data from the National Crime Records Bureau of India,[1] 50,900 atrocities against Dalits were reported in 2021. In a report submitted in the Parliament by Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai, 2544 cases of custodial deaths were reported in 2021-22.[2] The victims of custodial deaths largely hail from marginalised communities, including SCs, STs, religious minorities, poor communities and so on. In a report submitted by the National Campaign against Torture (NCAT) in 2019,[3] 124 out of 125 custodial deaths were cases of individuals from marginalised groups.

Mariamma, a 40-year-old Dalit Christian woman from Telangana, died in police custody on 18 June 2021.[4] She used to work as a cook, and her employer, Balashouri, a priest, lodged a complaint that two lakhs had been stolen from his house. Mariamma's 21-year-old son, Uday, and his friend, Shankar, were arrested on 15 June 2021 as alleged suspects in the crime. Mariamma was then brought to the station two days later, on 17 June 2021. According to the FIR filed at Addaguddur police station on 18 June 2021, Uday and Shankar confessed, voluntarily, to the crime. Uday stated that Mariamma, Shankar and him were put in different cells and were severely tortured. While Uday sustained grave injuries, Mariamma died due to brutal torture at the Addaguddur police station in the Yadadri-Bhuvanagiri district.

"Mariamma was an easy target for this violence because she was a Dalit," said Bishop Wilson Singham, chief of Independent Churches, Union of India and Bishop OHOG (One Human One God) Diocese. "Mariamma is one of many Christians not formally registered as Christian. Hence the police could be charged with the Prevention of Atrocities Act. If she were a registered Christian, the caste angle in this crime would not have surfaced," he added.

The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950 identifies communities who have faced marginalisation across several factors—social, economic and educational, and arising from untouchability. In the second paragraph, the order gives a Scheduled Caste status to all the rec-

ognised communities in the list; however, in the third paragraph, the ruling restricts this status to the individuals of these communities who profess Hinduism only:

Notwithstanding anything contained in paragraph 2, no person who professes a religion different from Hinduism shall be deemed to be a member of a Scheduled Caste.

Following immense political pressure from Sikhs and Buddhist Dalit converts, the order was amended to include Sikhs, in 1956, and Buddhists, in 1990. The Scheduled Caste category provides the members with affirmative action and protects the communities under the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. This presidential order excludes Dalit Christians and Muslims from being recognised as Scheduled Castes, hence depriving them of the rights that their fellow Dalits, who are Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist, can avail of. Most importantly, due to this exclusion from the Scheduled caste category, Dalit Christians cannot avail of the Prevention of Atrocities Act, 1989. Many Dalits who practise Christianity, therefore, officially retain their religion as Hindu, in order to avail of the rights that the SC status gives. Due to this exclusion, Dalits formally registered as Christians are not considered "Dalit" by the state—even in the case of crimes committed against Dalit Christians because of their caste.

"While caste is not a part of Christianity, caste is embedded in Indian culture. When Dalit Christians are subject to everyday casteism and atrocities, it is their caste that is playing a significant role," Franklin Caesar Thomas, coordinator of the National Council of Dalit Christians and a lawyer fighting a landmark case in the Supreme Court for Scheduled Caste status for Dalit Christians, said. "The exclusion of Dalit Christians from the Schedule Caste category silences the motive of many atrocities against them," he added.

Many incidents are often not reported by the SCs and STs, in part because of reluctance stemming from the fear of upper castes. Many police officers refuse to file complaints in these cases as well. An apex court with a bench of Justices DY Chandrachud and BV Nagaratna stated that "many perpetrators of caste-based atrocities get away scot-free due to shoddy investigations and the negligence of prosecuting advocates. This results in low conviction rates under the SC/ST Act,

giving rise to the erroneous perception that cases registered under the SC/ST Act are false and that it is being misused."[5]

Initially, the police involved in Mariamma's death were only dismissed, without being charged with the Prevention of Atrocities (SC and ST) Act, 1989. It was only on 12 July 2021, after the intervention of ex-IAS officer Akunuri Murali, that the charges were added. But this was only possible since Mariamma held SC status, as she was not a registered Christian. This tendency was evident in past cases as well; for instance, Pranay Perumalla, a 24-year-old Dalit Christian and the victim of an honour killing in Telangana, was referred to as Dalit, not Dalit Christian, by most media reportage.[6] Pranay, like Mariamma, was not a registered Christian, and hence the violence against him was recognised as an attack of casteism by the state and the media. But on the contrary, in the killing of Kevin Joseph, a Dalit Christian from Kerala, who was murdered in an honour killing, the perpetrators were not charged under the Atrocities Act because Kevin was officially excluded from the SC category. All the ten accused who were found guilty under various sections of the Indian Penal Code, including 302 (murder), 364A (kidnapping for ransom) and Section 506 (2) (Punishment for criminal intimidation) have been awarded a double life term in the case. Despite being a Dalit and the crime being due to caste honour, unfortunately, the culprits could not be booked under the Atrocities Act. However, due to the pressure from his public prosecutor, the court declared his death as an honour killing.

We can understand from these instances that this exclusion not only takes away the right to dual identity and protection but also erases a lot of data related to Dalit atrocities, particularly when the Atrocities Act cannot be legally applied. The researcher attempts to understand how crimes against Dalits, specifically Dalit Christians, are reported by focussing on the *Deccan Chronicle*'s coverage of Mariamma's custodial death.

METHODOLOGY

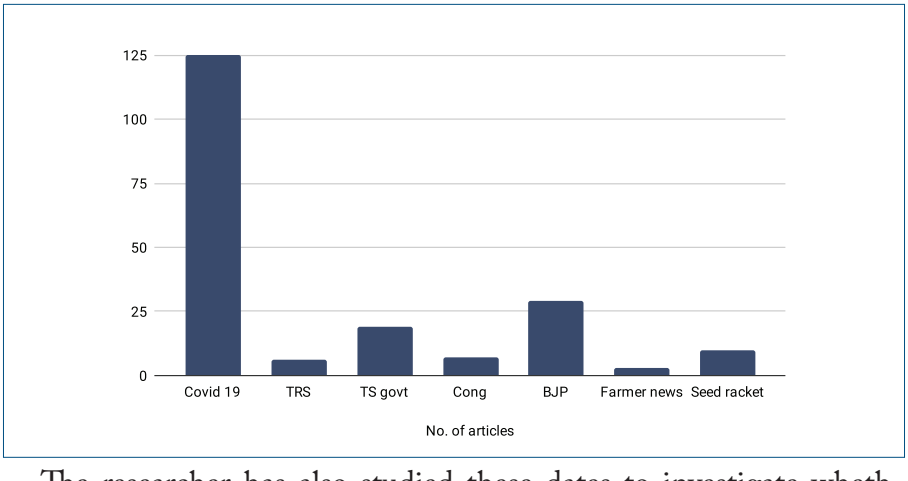
The researcher analysed 30 days of coverage, from 10 June 2021 to 10 July 2021. The study divides the dates into three phases—10 to 18 June 2021, starting eight days before Mariamma's death; 19 to 28 June

2021, that is, up until ten days after her death; and 29 June to 10 July 2021, reportage after Mariamma's kin were offered compensation from the government. It attempts to understand the nuances of the *Deccan Chronicle*'s reportage surrounding the incident through quantitative and qualitative methods. The researcher has analysed all the articles in the paper, excluding the business, sports and lifestyle pages.

Deccan Chronicle is an English daily newspaper, published in Hyderabad and founded in the 1930s by Rajagopal Mudaliar. It has eight editions in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, and it is also circulated from Chennai and Benguluru, with an overall circulation of 1.45 million copies per day.[7]

Phase 1: 10 to 18 June 2021

The objective of studying this period is to understand the nature of news reportage before the incident in the *Deccan Chronicle*. News related to COVID-19; the ruling political party, Telangana Rashtra Samithi (in October 2022, it was renamed Bharat Rashtra Samithi); the Opposition parties—the BJP and the Congress; farmers' issues; the Telangana government; and the seeds racket were commonly reported in this phase. As the diagram below illustrates, coverage related to COVID-19 dominated.



The researcher has also studied these dates to investigate whether the paper reported any caste crimes in the week, focussing, as well, on *Deccan Chronicle*'s reportage related to the police and to understand the language used. No caste crimes or religious crimes were reported

during this period.

There was a total of 28 articles related to the police. Twenty-seven news items largely comprised articles about the police, concerning its busting of rackets, statements about thefts, robberies, violence and so on. The tone of the reporting was neutral and not analytical. Out of 28, one article leaned towards blaming the police for chaos and the report's tone is neutral. No articles depicted the police in a positive—philanthropic or humanitarian—angle.

	Total no. of articles related to police	Negative news related to police	Positive news related to police
Number of articles	28	1	0

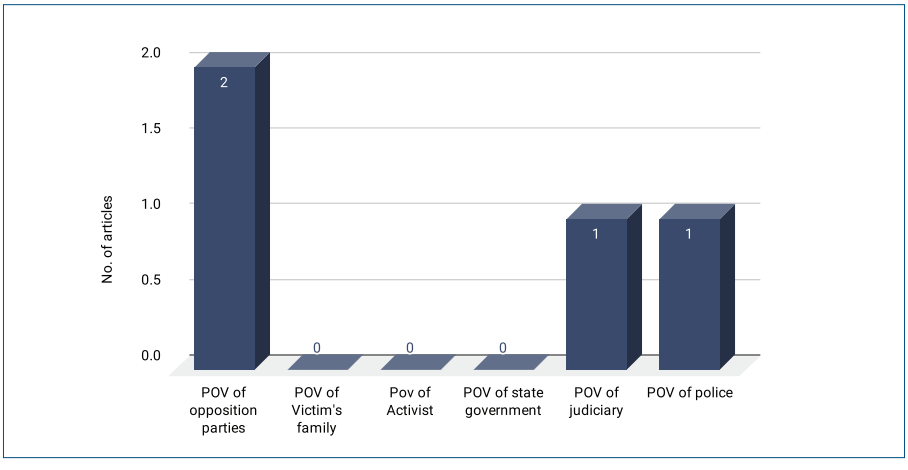
Phase 2: 19 to 28 June 2021

Despite Mariamma's death having occurred on 18 June 2021, the *Deccan Chronicle* reported the news after four days, on 22 June 2021. The total number of articles related to Dalits in Phase 2 is eight, of which five are related to Mariamma. One article related to Mariamma made it to the front page on 25 June 2021. There was no direct reportage of the incident involving Mariamma's death; the first report was from the point-of-view of Bhatti Vikramarka, a Congress leader, demanding justice. The other articles were also POVs of different people or organisations, as the table below shows.

	POV of opposition parties	POV of state government	POV of judiciary	POV of police
Number of articles	2	0	1	1

One article related to Mariamma was published on the front page during this phase. The POVs of the victim's family were not reported. There was no surge in reportage on caste crimes, custodial deaths or attacks on Christians. No POVs of activists were reported, no POVs of celebrities were reported and no editorials or opinion pieces about Mariamma's death were carried during this phase. The victim is referred to as a "Dalit woman" and a lock-up death victim in the articles pub-

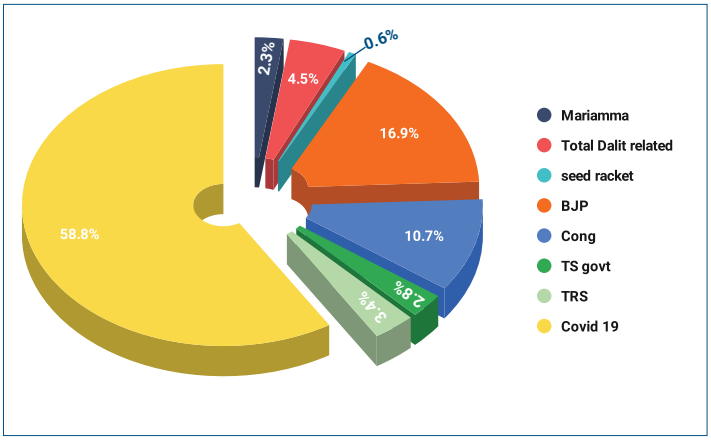
lished about her in this phase. No articles were published referring to the victim as a Dalit Christian and no articles were published carrying the POV of Christian organisations.



Sixteen articles related to the police were published in this phase. Most of them continue to be news about police in action. And one report praised the hi-tech equipment of the Siddipet Telangana police.

	Total no. of articles related to police	Negative news related to police	Positive news related to police
number of articles	16	0	1

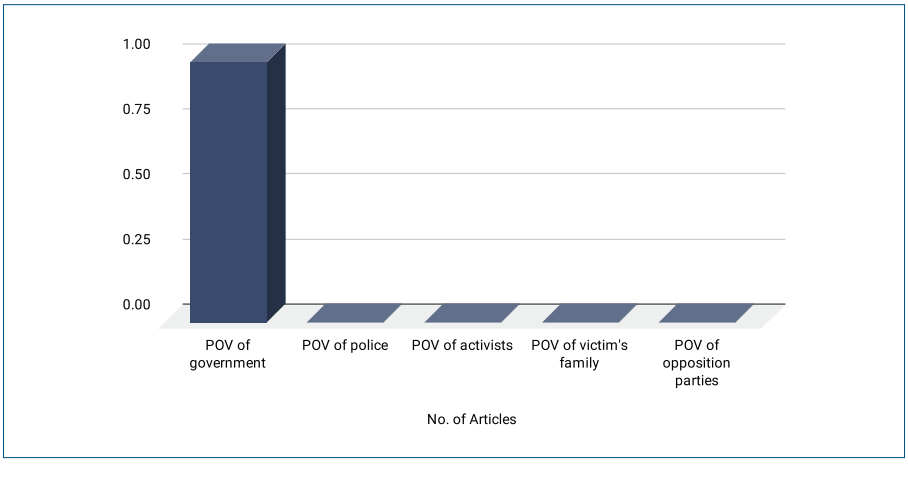
News related to COVID-19 continued to be the most reported in Phase 2, followed by news reported related to the BJP, Congress, TRS etc.



Phase 3: 29 June to 10 July 2021

As the pressure grew from the Opposition, on 28 June, Mariamma's kin were offered Rs 35 lakhs as compensation for the tragedy, by Telangana's chief minister, K Chandrashekar Rao. Mariamma's son, who was also a victim of custodial violence, was offered a job as an office subordinate at the Social Welfare department, Khammam.

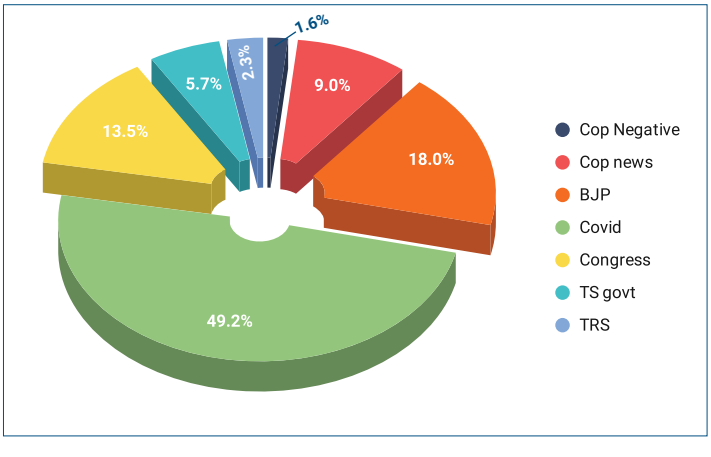
The news related to compensation for Mariamma's family was published on 29 June 2021. Only one article about Mariamma was published in this phase, and that was also the only article related to Dalits. There were no articles from the POV of the victim's family, activists, police, or judiciary in this phase. There were no articles from the POV of opposition parties about Mariamma, or other Dalit issues, during this time either.



No articles were published from the POV of the police regarding Mariamma's case. Twenty-two articles relating to the police overall were published. Seventeen articles related to the police giving statements about busting robberies and rackets. Four articles carried negative news about the police, and one was positive. The negative news covered police harassment of paan shops, suspension of a police official over the murder of a colleague and so on. The positive news was about Telangana State police being the best in passport verifications.

	Total no. of articles about the police	Positive news related to the police	Negative news related to the police
number of articles	22	1	4

COVID-19 continued to be the most reported, followed by news related to the BJP, the Congress, Telengana state government, TRS and so on. There was no drastic surge in news reportage in this phase.



CONCLUSION

During the phase that saw reportage of Mariamma, *Deccan Chronicle* had two crime reporters in the bureau. While the paper reported crime stories on a regular basis, it only reported Mariamma's death after Bhatti Vikramarka, a prominent Congress leader, raised the issue. The

story was a report carrying his statement. None of the stories explicitly highlighted the police as violators and none treated this incident as a crime story, in either of the phases. It was only on 18 July 2021—a month after Mariamma's death—that the *Deccan Chronicle* published a critical report on Telangana police violence in relation to Mariamma. While Mariamma's caste location was mentioned, no report mentions the caste location of the police involved, in either of the phases. Furthermore, while Mariamma's incident was the most reported caste crime in the 30 days examined, the reportage was still not serious, and neither was it considered as an active crime investigation. The fact that it took a month for a critical report of police brutality indicates how the violence was neither sensationalised nor critically thought about or examined by the newspaper bureau.

The coverage of Mariamma's death in the *Deccan Chronicle* was minimal. There was no direct reportage on the incident. Instead, the news was only reported when the opposition, judiciary and police spoke about it. The coverage ignored the identity of the victim Dalit Christian. The reportage lacked multiple perspectives and did not feature any piece with a detailed understanding of custodial deaths in India and how caste, class and religion play a role in these deaths.

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CONCLUSION

News media is an integral force in modern democracies, advancing a just world order to their populations. Concepts like "inclusivity," "fairness" and "accuracy" have been vital in holding the news media accountable in democracies. The study of fifteen cases taken from across India allows us to state the following findings.

Violence is often the reason for media to start coverage when marginality is involved

An issue of the working class, the poor, the marginalised seeking a right or a just demand could go on for a long time, but the media would pay attention to it only after it turns violent. Take, for example, the Sterilite factory protest. The protest went on for almost 100 days, but the coverage started only after the police shooting on 23 May 2018, which killed 14 people. Similarly, in the 2005 torching of 55 homes of the lowered caste Valmiki community in Hariyana by the Jaat landlords, the, the media completely ignored the brewing of caste tension in the weeks prior to the incident. The same pattern is visible in the coverage of the communal killings in Delhi in February-March 2020 and the ethno-religious violence in Manipur in May 2023. While social tension was on the rise in each of these incidents and a few more studied in this report, the media had priorities elsewhere.

Law enforcement or the police was the single most contributor of news, while the marginalised get very little space

In the event that a protest, a group demanding rights, or the victimisation of the marginalised is reported in media, often the single largest contributor of news is the law enforcement. This shows how journalists often consider the stories to be crime stories or law and order stories,

and intrinsically the versions of the police and government takes precedence over the people. This is evident in all newspapers studied. The problem here is the thinking of the reporters and editors—that the bigger and often the final say in that matter is seen to lie with law-enforcement agencies, as opposed to considering law enforcement as just another point of view. The victims and the marginalised certainly do not get to be at an equal par with law enforcement.

Even when the newspapers are regarded fairer and more responsive, such as *The Indian Express* and *Prabhat Khabar*, the pattern of yielding to the police and law-enforcement agencies is evident. *The Indian Express* treated the caste-violence stories as only crime stories, and often missed multiple points of views, especially failing to see and note the systemic nature of caste discrimination that leads to such violence. The principal failure of the reporting overall, this study concludes, is the inability to contextualise the incidents within the framework of caste conflict in the district, the state or even India in general. *Prabhat Khabar*, in the case of fake encounter killings, where the wrongdoing is done by the government agencies itself, still gives the police version highest prominence. Most reports do not contain quotes from villagers, and family members of the marginalised, and appear to be a modified version of police press releases. Nor do the articles dig deeper, or seem to be asking questions about the necessity and relevance of fake encounters. The repeated occurrence of fake encounters in places like Jharkhand is also indicative of the fact that the press and media generally approve of encounters, thereby providing a morale boost to the police to do such extra-judicial killings repeatedly as it chooses to be reverential to law enforcement even when they are at fault.

Public outrage draws media attention to rights violation incidents

In situations when the media end up covering a rights issue, such as the custodial death of the father and son, Jayaraj and Bennix, in Tamil Nadu, the press ignores or delays the coverage of gross human rights violations until there is public outrage. A few days after George Floyd's killing rocked the world, in India, Jayaraj and Bennix, two Backward Class people following the minority Christian faith, were killed in police custody. The study reveals that the coverage started only after there

was an outrage, outside of media. And when the media finally began to cover it, the family or relatives of the deceased victims comprised as meagre as one percent of the total news area covering the duo's custodial deaths.

The most prominent space was given to sources of a different nature, such as Twitter comments on the issue by celebrities, press releases by government officials and the police, and so on. The newspaper *Dina Thanthi* chose not to raise the substantial questions around the custodial death. Out of the eight editorials it had on the subject, only one made a mild suggestion that the police department needs reformation. Others made observations about speedy trials, investigations, departmental proceedings, and often were accompanied by sweeping and cliched phrasing such as "the perpetrators should be punished rigorously." The editors who write editorials were not thinking or researching hard, or speaking to experts, or seemed oblivious of the lessons from George Floyd's death and the continuing global outrage at that time. They did not question the conduct of the police with regard to the people in their custody, nor the long history of custodial deaths of the marginalised in India. In the second custodial death case studied of Mariamma, the Dalit Christian house-help who was tortured to death in Telangana, the coverage was not started by the journalists on their own, but after public opinion against it started with a local politician raising the issue—it was the comment of the local politician that made into as the first news report. Similarly, the forest-dependent Adivasis protesting in Nagarhole National Park managed to get some coverage in one of the smaller newspapers when a politician from the Opposition visited the protestors. According to a report submitted by the National Campaign against Torture (NCAT) in 2019, 124 out of 125 custodial deaths were of individuals who belonged to marginalised groups, such as the Adivasis, Dalits, lowered caste Christians, Muslims etc. The question of systemic justice hardly comes to the newsroom, and therefore, news media contributes very little to the solution of a problem that will surface again, elsewhere, with another death in custody.

Media bias becomes clear when reporting is selectively mixed with opinions

Bringing commentary into a report is something not allowed in writing

journalistic reports, and when the media selectively puts to use such practices, the bias in coverage becomes evident. The communal bias of *Dainik Jagran*'s coverage of the Delhi violence showed that in certain kinds of news reports it reported without bringing in opinions, and in others, it added opinions. The newspaper often editorialised an issue if the accused was Muslim, or part of anti-CAA protests, passing its bias freely, while it preferred to use a neutral reported voice when the accused belonged to the Hindu-nationalist group.

Newspapers prefer to cover an issue from the nearest city than to be on the spot

From the 2005 Gohana caste violence, when landed-caste men set on fire 55 Dalit homes and for which the coverage of *The Indian Express* was studied, to the 2017 Saharanpur caste violence—where two people were killed and 25 Dalit houses were burned—and the same newspaper was studied, or in the case of the Tamil newspaper *Dina Malar*'s coverage of the police killing 14 workers when they protested at a factory in Tamil Nadu, a pattern was evident. The news media either did not send a journalist to the ground to cover the incident—preferring to go with the police version, often taken down over the phone, or the reaction of the politicians in the cities—or, if it did send a journalist, it still constituted only a far smaller percentage of the coverage compared to the reports filed from the distant city.

Gohana, where 55 houses were torched, is just 80 kilometres from *The Indian Express* office in Delhi, but the paper sends no journalist to do an on-the-ground report. Not only that—the coverage that was done lacked on-the-ground reporting of the conflict and missed key details, context and viewpoints. Ignoring the build-up of the conflict ensured that there was no pressure on the administration and the law-enforcement agencies to intervene early and possibly stop the attack. When finally reported, after the violence, the sources were invariably from the police and the law-enforcement agencies. And finally, there was no attempt to relate the conflict to larger social debates on caste.

Protesters moving to Delhi increases media coverage

The news coverage of an event increases when the cause in question travels to Delhi. The victims, or the people representing or supporting

the victims, such as the caste atrocity that took place in Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh, travelled to Delhi halfway through the period studied. The study shows a spurt in coverage in *The Indian Express*. And the newspaper even carried an editorial when the protest moved to Delhi. If it is a rights-related issue, and the protests around it occur far from the metropolis, it draws less attention from the media.

Caste of the victims mentioned, but the name of the higher caste skips mention

One pattern was visible in most of the reporting of the Saharanpur violence, where the victims in the incident, the Dalits, are mentioned as Dalits, but the caste of those who attacked them is not mentioned in the reports. The word "Thakur" is missing in many of the reports, making those reports look incomplete without the crucial information regarding the communities between which the clashes are taking place. Similarly, in the custodial deaths of the father and son in Tamil Nadu, and the Dalit Christian in Telangana too, the newspapers do not mention the caste of the officers who tortured the victims to death.

Rights issue of the marginalised is framed as a nuisance to the public

The rights-oriented congregations of people, or peaceful democratic protests, are presented in its coverage as a nuisance to the public. But this hardly defines who the public is. Often the protestors who were on the street to protect their environment from a polluting mining company is not counted as the public. Editorials and commentaries are written with this inherent bias against those who protest for a democratic right.

In rape and murder too, caste plays a role; the lowered caste woman got far less coverage

One expects caste not to play a role in the coverage of such heinous crimes as rape and murder. But unfortunately, it does. When the victim of rape was an upper caste woman, the newspaper gave far better coverage—twenty-five front page reports in the period studied—in comparison to when the victim was a Dalit woman, who was raped and killed, and the same newspaper gave only a single story in its front pages.

In a women's strike, the men get to speak more than women

Even when it came to an issue affecting women, the media preferred to quote men to explain it over women. The gender bias of the media was evident in the study of thousands of women who protested against the MFIs in Punjab. The male voice speaking on behalf of the women received double the print space of the protesting women.

In a labour issue, the voice of industrialists, the state and police gets more space than the rights of the workers

In the coverage of the workers' strike studied—the Honda factory strike that led to police action against the workers (*The Times of India*, 2005); the police firing at copper-plant workers, which killed 14 people (*Dina Malar*, 2018) and the strike of the sanitation workers in Bangalore demanding PPE kits and drinking water as frontline workers during the pandemic (*Vijayavani*, *Vijaya Karnataka* and *Prajavani*, July 2020)—it is clear the media coverage shows an inherent bias against the workers. Not only is it that the space provided in the quantitative analysis was far less compared to other points of view, but there was a sense of apathy regarding the rights for which people were on the street—these were seen as routine, not news-worthy, old-fashioned, and "anti-progress," etc., as opposed to points of view that need to be inclusive and require to be covered in equitable measure. The view points of industrialists, the state, or the police often outsized the point of view of the workers, by many times.

Media is partial against the religious minorities—Christian and Muslims—when they are at the receiving end of violence

Considering the statistics of the human casualties in the ethno-religious targeted violence in Manipur, the magnitude of the Kuki community's losses, mostly of Christian origin, is undoubtedly unparalleled. Despite this, the Meitei civilians have 71.42 percent more representation than the Kuki civilians in the *Hindustan Times*' news coverage. New Delhi's most-read English newspaper's coverage also shied away from reporting on the significant number of church attacks, other than passing mentions from some sources. In the case study of the Delhi violence in early 2020, the worst that the city had seen since the anti-Sikh riots in 1984, 54 people were killed, of which 43 were Muslims and ten were Hindus, and one a police officer (also Hindu). However, the coverage

of *Dainik Jagran*, India's most widely read Hindi newspaper presented Muslims as rioters, and almost never as victims of the violence. When it comes to the riot victims too, this bias is evident. There are 32 mentions of riot victims when they are Hindu, while only five mentions when the riot victims are Muslims, in spite of the majority of the victims being Muslims.

Newspaper coverage prefers forced confessions of the prisoners under police custody, as opposed to the free statements they submit in the court

In the case of many who were lodged in jail, charged during the time of the global war on terrorism, there was a terrible imbalance in coverage, visible in the representation of points of view. The police or government version far outnumbered, in area and display. The media reported information based on forced confessions, published misinformation and lies, and selectively ignored certain facts that could have been verified against records placed in the court. Further, it did not rectify its faulty journalism practices, even after the Delhi High Court and Supreme Court took strong objections against the "media trial," "lies the police planted" and so on. This is evident from the coverage of the *Hindustan Times* in the case of the national security conflict studied.

In honour killings, human interest, and not systemic injustice or social prejudice, triggers the coverage

In the case studied, of an honour killing where the man was killed because his caste and class was a source of shame for the woman's family, the media coverage treated the death as a human-interest story. The articles detailed their love story, without a deeper introspection into the menacing prevalence of honour killings in Indian society and what leads to them. The reports presented the incident as a one-off case, as a fleeting incident, without contextualising how prevalent the intolerance to inter-caste, inter-class, inter-religious, inter-cultural, inter-ethnic marriages are, and how many lead to honour killings.

Inclusivity in coverage starts from diversity in newsrooms

As we have seen in the introduction and the studies carried out by CSDS and Oxfam, it is clear that people from a handful of elite social

groups dominate India's newsrooms, in both ownership and editorial capacities. Ideally, for the kind of diversity that Indian society has—in caste, religion, language, etc—the country's media industry and its representational bodies must be getting serious about addressing the issue of diversity in its newsrooms. But there has not been any meaningful attempt from India's leading media bodies, such as the Press Council, Indian Newspaper Society, Editor's Guild, etc in addressing the issue. An older democracy, such as the United States, has had fair luck in addressing the issue of diversity in newsrooms, while its influential body, the American Society of Newspaper Editors, conducted annual surveys on newsroom diversity after 1978. These surveys helped gradually push US newsrooms into accepting more people of colour and diverse sexual and gender orientations. When the survey began, minorities were only four percent of the newsroom staff. Now, nearly half a century later, the share is 16.6 percent, in many cases even more than the proportionate representation of the people. But in India, unfortunately, there is no similar accountability mechanism among the top media bodies. Given the role that media plays in a democracy, the skewed representation issue will have an impact on the nature of the democracy India will shape itself into. A more equitable representation of the array of views and voices that surround each issue and conflict, however small or localised or globally linked they are, is mandatory for the survival of a democratic society. Diversity in human resources that constitutes the newsroom—from ownership to editorial—is vital in ensuring inclusiveness in coverage as well.

WHAT MORE?

Some of the studies in this report—such as the caste violence in Haryana, the workers' strike in Gurgaon, and the prisoners' rights in the terrorism case, where two of the accused were found to be innocent—were carried out when the Indian press freedom rankings fluctuated between 80 and 106.

Today the Indian press freedom rank is at 161. The three news events mentioned earlier took place at least ten years before Narendra Modi became the prime minister, and often, the slipping rank of the Indian press to 161 is politically demarcated to the rise of Modi, and the Hindu-right ideology in Indian society. While it is amply clear from

qualitative and quantitative terms how press freedom has reduced substantially after the ascent of Modi, it is also true that some of the basic and most vital values in the journalistic profession—such as inclusivity of voices, especially of the marginalised—was not paid any heed in Indian newsrooms even before. The problem is more systemic, with the Hindu far-right ideology aggravating the already-worse press freedom standards, and therefore needs many levels of engagement.

Even if it was slow and gradual, over the years, bodies like the ASNE played a role in bringing qualitative changes in many newsrooms in the United States. India is yet to witness an equivalent intervention from Indian press bodies or an influential Indian publisher towards inclusiveness in press coverage, diversity in the newsroom and other steps required to make Indian press socially responsible.

Take, for example, what an insider intervention by a leading publisher like Henry Luce did to better the press model in the United States. Soon after the Great Depression, the role of the press was so dubious that even the entertainment space, Hollywood, was scathingly critical of journalists. Publishers and editors were the latest villains in a number of movies. The public discarded the press in large numbers, distrusting its role for aligning as a tool in the hands of the big businesses that created the Depression. The libertarian press model had gone too far to the right of the interest of money to be any good socially for the public in a democracy. Luce, the owner of *Time*, realised that if people like himself did not intervene, journalism itself would be in danger. He thus funded an "independent inquiry into the present state and future prospects of the freedom of press in the United States," led by Robert Hutchins, the chancellor of the University of Chicago.

The final report became a post-war charter for the American media, and gradually had an impact on most of the presses in democracies. The commission stressed the press's social responsibility towards the public. It laid down five bedrock principles that the media must follow, including a forum for the exchange of comment and criticism and "a means of projecting the opinions and attitudes of the groups in the society to one another." A study in the *Columbia Journalism Review* credited the report with having revitalised public debate about the press in subsequent decades. "The Report served notice on journalism that its performance was no longer a matter of internal concern, the mere operation of a business," the study said. Indeed, where there are miles to

go in many areas for the press to gain trust, the *Columbia Journalism Review* essay pointed out that the Luce-funded commission helped bring about efforts to diversify American newsrooms. Interventions like the Hutchins Commission gave a framework for the American press. The Indian press certainly lacks one such framework of social responsibility, without which it oscillates between libertarian and authoritarian press models. In the times we live in, with the rise of authoritarianism and strongmen leadership, the press can further slip down the road of totalitarian press models, like in China and Russia. The press under Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey is travelling down that road too.

Indian media already has a set of instructions from the Press Council of India. But what is required are not instructions, but a framework that binds Indian news media to reflect on and correct a number of destructive forces that obstruct the building of a democratic media. The monopoly of certain social sections controlling the press, from ownership to the constitution of the newsroom, is one of the principal issues. Without a moral framework like the Social Responsibility model, Indian media coverage would be far from inclusive. Creating a philosophical framework would automatically build dialogues in the public around the conduct and ethics of media, to a point that misbehaviour leads to distrust, and distrust leads to loss of face and revenue—this would be a deterrent to messing up. Without such an ethical and moral framework, the character of the ownership, the social monopoly of certain caste groups in the Indian news media, the disproportionate reverence towards the versions of the police and law enforcement, will cause the public to further lose its trust in the Indian news media. Building an ethical framework around Social Responsibility would hopefully also create a media culture that would empower young people from diverse backgrounds. Journalists from diverse economic, social, class, gender and other marginal backgrounds will bring in better and more grounded understandings of the issues at hand, and besides, they can also question their higher-ups, and the caste and class monopoly of a few sections in the newsrooms, so that the coverage of Indian media becomes more democratic and inclusive.

In a democracy, if the press fails to be inclusive in its coverage and in its consitution, then it is no longer a matter of internal concern.

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"Maintaining diversity in the newsroom and providing inclusive content is imperative for the longevity of any media platform."

- World Economic Forum

"You don't get to transparency about diversity by relying on people's goodwill."

- Meredith Clark

"Without a diverse and inclusive team, a newsroom does a grave disservice to its mission and mandate."

- Global Future Council on Media, Entertainment and Sport

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